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A SWEET LITTLE CHERUB THAT SITS UP ALOFT.

A SWEET LITTLE CHERUB.

(See Illustration.)

What cheer, my heart? A cherub like that Is likely to spoil Your nautical hat; Where did you get Such a lovable prize, With such cherry cheeks And such laughing eyes? The jolly Jack Tar Was merry and gay; He said with a laugh, As he turned away, "This youngster is mine, And a very good sort To welcome a Tar When he comes to port. I love well my Queen, And I love my ship, And I also love A good can of flip; But I love," said he— He laughed as he spoke— "I love best of all This young heart of oak."—M. J.

THE SQUIRES' PEW
IN THE
OLD CHURCH AT LULLINGHAM.
BY MRS. A. HARPER.

CHAPTER I.

It was Christmas Eve, in the year of grace 1707.

The little village of Lullingham lay sleeping in the shadow of the Kentish hills, as it had done for a thousand years. The setting sun still touched the uplands that rose behind the hamlet with a tender though pallid beauty, but the low-lying pastures were already dark in the gathering twilight, and the tiny rills, which in summer-time tinkled like fairy-bells along the sedgy water-courses were now hardened and silent within their reedy belts. Yet the crisp air was not wholly silent, for in the belfry of the ancient church the ringers were softly practising the Christmas carols that were in a few hours to ring in the blessed Christmas-tide.

The church itself was strewn with goodly piles of evergreens and filled with a throng of villagers, who had been decorating not ungracefully the grey old structure. Daylight had died away while they wrought, and now their rosy faces and quaint eighteenth-century costumes moved into alternate light and shadow beneath the flickering rays of a huge cresset, borne aloft by Isaac Cloke, the parish clerk. All at once a displeased murmur arose near the chancel, and a youth approached Isaac with visible discontent. "There were not holly-berries now to make the Table look seemly!" he muttered, "and the Parson would be angered. Father Isaac had taken all the best to deck the Squires' Pew. I'm thinking," he added, "that it's hardly right the holiest place should be left so bare, while now and to spare has been used for the Pew."

The old clerk darted a withering glance at the speaker. "Whisht, Roger, whist," said he, "ye know nothing about it. The Table's a holy place, no doubt, and should have a goodly decking, as is most justly due; but, after all, it's not the Squires' Pew, where the Lords of Lullingham have knelt and worshipped for hundreds of years!"

"Is it called the Squire's Pew because the Squire sits up on high there?" asked a tall maiden, as she paused in wreathing a low arch.

"What!" cried the old clerk, fiercely, for he had been put out by the youth's speech. "Art thou a Lullingham maid and knowst no better than that? What's thy name?"

"It's not a Lullingham maid, Father Isaac," answered a young man, whose delicately cut features testified to the Norman blood which had mingled with that of the Men of Kent in his peasant ancestry. "It's Gilian Grey out o' the Sheers," and she only came here two days ago.

"She's forgiven, then," uttered the old man, graciously. "I thought it could be none o' you that have heard me tell the story, off and on, these fifty years!"

"Tell it us again!" shouted Gilian's champion; "then Gilian'll know about it too."

"Yes! tell it us again, Father," cried a chorus of young voices. "It won't seem like Christmas Eve if 'ee doant."

Isaac was propitiated at once. "I'll tell it 'ee," he said, "lads and lasses; but first ye must all seek for berries to hang around the Table, or maybe the Parson will be angered, as Roger says."

A successful search was made, and then the old man—still Hale and upright, though numbering more than eighty years—marshalled them, with the air of a King-at-Arms, in front of the Squires' Pew.

This was, however, no pew at all in the modern acceptation of the word, but a recess south of the altar, which had been used in olden times as a chapel of St. Edith. The shrine of the Saxon virgin had, indeed, been destroyed, and her image torn from its niche; but there yet remained in the south wall four lofty stalls of carved oak, reached by steps, and erected possibly for the priests or "chauntries," but in which, since the Reformation, the lord and lady of the manor had been wont to sit with their eldest son and daughter on either hand, the younger members of the family occupying an oaken dais immediately beneath. Above them hung the banners of their line, the pavement at their feet was thick with monumental brasses, while on the wall were no fewer than seven tablets of white marble, bearing coats of arms richly coloured.

"Look, children," said the old man reverently, as he pointed to the stalls and dais. "Thrice in two hundred years have seven Squires of Lullingham knelt here before marching away to battle. The first time was on the eve of Barnet fight, when Lancelot Polhill and his six sons heard vespers, little dreaming that in a few short hours all seven would lie slain upon the bloody field for the sake of Queen Margaret and her son. The second time," he continued, with faltering voice, "I myself remember. I can see now the old Squire Thomas, and six youths—not to be matched among the Squires of Kent—around him. All seven fell at Newbury fighting for King Charles! Men do say that the King himself looked upon them after the battle and knighted them as they lay dead—of that I speak not certainly; what I do know is that the next Sabbath two widows knelt together in these stalls, and a little babe was brought to be baptized in the old font yonder. Since those days this hath ever been called the Squires' Chancel, or rather the Squires' Pew. Look up children! and see upon the wall the names of the seven Squires of Lullingham who died for the blessed King!"

His hearers raised their eyes as he spoke, and glanced at the well-known shields. Highest of all hung that of Thomas

Polhill, below it those of his six sons. Their names stood out in the flickering torchlight!

Lancelot, Eustace, Reginald, Hugh, Edward, Lionel.

No word added save the dates of birth and death, and in golden letters the motto of their house—"Pro Rege et pro Patria." Isaac pointed to each name, and then let his wand rest upon that of the eldest son, Lancelot. "I loved them all," he said, "but this one dearest. I was his henchman, and I followed him to battle; I brought his body home with the others for burial—they lie beneath this pavement—and I knelt here with the two dames at the little babe's baptism. But who was the little Babe?" asked Gilian "out o' the Sheers." "Who?" responded the old man. "Who but our own Squire his son? Ye may call him Sir Thomas if ye will, for the Queen has knighted him, but he'll always be the Squire of Lullingham to me. These arms bore him to the font, for the women shook too much with fear and sorrow to be able well to carry him. And I said good-bye to warfare after that night. Your grandfathers know I've been clerk and schoolmaster for wellnigh sixty years."

"But look, Father Isaac," cried the observant Gilian, "the last stall is left undecorated. Have ye forgotten it?"

"No," replied the schoolmaster, with a sudden change of tone, while the other girls gave Gilian nudges and pinches, "I have not forgotten it. The West Stall is the seat of the eldest daughter of the house. The eldest daughter has disobeyed her parents, and is absent, and I must keep the Squire's order that her seat be left undecorated."

"It's right you should keep it, Father," said the voice of a comely middle-aged woman who had entered while Isaac was speaking, "but Sir Thomas has given no such order to me." And as the woman spoke, she let down her apron, full of evergreens and choice flowers. Old Isaac looked neither displeased nor glad.

"Well, I've done my part," he observed, with a sagacious air, "and it's time these lads and lasses were home to supper." He stepped forward as he spoke, and the villagers trooped noisily after him out of the church.

Gilian remained, and, behind a pillar, the youth who had defended her. "Ye'll stay and help me, may be," said the woman, as she perceived them, and, handing the stripling a festoon, she bade him twine it round the carved pinnacle of the Western Stall.

The wreaths which the unexpected visitor had brought were composed almost entirely of white holly leaves, bearing scarcely a mark of green or crimson. There were also flowers, and, last, a single chaplet of pale monthly roses. All these Winifred Cloke arranged with a tearful eye and loving hand. "These flowers," she said, as if to herself, "are not more pure and sweet than was the Squire's daughter, and her foster-sister will not leave her stall undecorated, though Bride Vernon may be across the water and forgotten by those who should love her best."

Gilian's curiosity rose high at these mysterious words, and she would have spoken, had not a glance from Ralph restrained her. Winifred shook up the crimson cushions—

"Twenty years to-morrow since she knelt here at the first wedding festival," she murmured, with a sigh. Then, raising high her lantern, she bestowed a lingering glance upon the Squires' Pew and passed before the youth and maiden down the ancient aisle.

CHAPTER II.

And now my readers must learn something of that "first wedding festival" which Winifred Cloke with so much emotion had associated with the Squire's absent daughter, Bride Vernon.

Early in life Thomas Polhill had married the orphan daughter of a Scottish Earl, whom he had seen in the Royal antechamber on one of those rare occasions when he visited Whitehall. About the same time the widowed mother of his bride consented to share her fortunes with those of a certain Dr. Nicholas Prendergast, a clergyman of ancient family and high reputation, and the horizon of the two high-born ladies—for years one of storm and gloom—now seemed at last to promise a future of sunshine for them both; but the prospect was suddenly and terribly overclouded. Dr. Prendergast, while away from home, was attacked by the plague, and fell a victim to it in a few hours.

The dreadful news was brought to Lullingham Castle, where the still youthful Countess had been happily presiding over the cradle of Lady Bridget's first-born child. She was herself in the expectation of becoming a mother, and the sudden calamity was more than her delicate frame could bear. She gave birth, prematurely, to a daughter, and died soon afterwards.

One of the most engaging traits of Lady Bridget's otherwise haughty character had been her tender devotion to the mother whose adversity she had shared, and her grief at this bereavement was overwhelming. She caused the little orphan to be brought into her chamber, and cradled with her own baby, until a nurse was found for it. Not long had she to seek one. Isaac Cloke had deemed it fitting that the same day which gave a mistress to the castle should also see one brought to the gabled school-house, and his wife, a robust country woman, many years his junior, was already nursing his little black-eyed daughter. Nancy Cloke and her little Winifred were soon installed at the Castle, and here the three children grew and thrived together in the ancient nursery.

Time passed on. Bride Polhill became the idol of her father, to whom she recalled his wife as first he saw her in the antechamber of the King; but it was remarked that Lady Bridget seemed to hold her young half-sister almost dearer than her child. The reason of this was probably that Joan Prendergast resembled both in character and loveliness the mother whom Bridget had so dearly loved, while Bride was in mind and person her own counterpart—haughty and self-reliant, and ready, if her will was crossed, to oppose her with a spirit as unbending as her own. Joan had never left Lullingham, and her grateful nature would not permit her in any way to thwart the wishes of the sister who had been to her like a mother. She possessed, however, a strength of principle unusual in one otherwise so yielding, which reminded those who had known him of her father, Dr. Nicholas Prendergast. Winifred Cloke was the much-loved bower maiden of her foster-sisters, and the joy of the old henchman's heart. The three were, indeed, so blooming that the castle was noted in the country round as the home of the fairest maids in Kent, while Bride and Joan were known as the "Roses of Lullingham."

Squire Polhill had been married on a Christmas Day, and he determined that the twentieth anniversary of his wedding should be celebrated with especial splendour. A goodly company were invited to attend service in the quaint old church, and to be present at a banquet in the great hall of the castle afterwards. Bride and Joan had long been engaged in embroidering dresses of silver brocade to be worn on the auspicious occasion, and resolved that each should be symbolic of Kentish produce—Lady Bridget's robe being worked with apple-blossoms and corn, while Bride's was to be wrought with the famous cherries, and Joan's with the hops of Kent. Rumour gave out that nothing so lovely as these festal robes had been seen in the "Valley of Castles;" and on Christmas Day the church

was filled with the Squire's guests and tenantry, anxious to do him honour, and not without curiosity as to the sight that should be presented in the far-famed "Squire's Pew."

The bells were still ringing when Thomas Polhill—than whom there could not be a more loving or loyal husband—entered St. Edith's Chapel, with his wife upon his arm, and placed her by him in the central stalls. Young Launcelot was on his father's right; and in the West Stall, beside her stately mother, sat the lovely Mistress Bride, the crimson and silver of her dress setting off her clear complexion and raven tresses. Joan should, by right, have been on the dais beneath, but this Bride's warm affection would not permit, and cushions had been so arranged that she stood almost even with her niece at the outer angle of the stall, the delicate green of her costume enhancing the fairness of her face and the golden hue of her hair.

Among those who had ridden over from Cheveley to the service were two young men, who had arrived as guests there the night before. These were James and Charles Vernon, brothers, of an old and wealthy family, holding office about the person of King James, whose godsons, indeed, they were. They had been seated by old Isaac in full view of St. Edith's Chapel; and, though careful to observe a seemly reverence, they yet could not raise their eyes without beholding the loveliness of the "Roses of Lullingham."

After service, the strangers were fain to remount their horses; but the Squire would not hear that any of gentle blood should depart without tasting his hospitality, and the brothers were nothing loth to find themselves in the great hall of the castle at the Christmas Feast.

Before the day was over, each had sought an opportunity of offering his homage; and James had found favour in the eyes of Mistress Bride, as Charles in those of Mistress Joan.

CHAPTER III.

Before the new year was in its second month, the brothers were the accepted suitors of the "Roses of Lullingham." Lady Bridget and her husband gave their full approval, but stipulated that the weddings should not take place till the next Christmas Day, and the young men themselves requested that the bridal dresses might be none other than the robes of silver tissue, wrought with the cherries and hops of Kent, in which they had first beheld their betrothed.

But, long ere the summer was over, the political horizon became overcast, and the Revolution, subsequently headed by the Prince of Orange, loomed already in the distance. For the first time, a difference of opinion arose between Sir Thomas and his future sons-in-law. The Squire of Lullingham hated Popery, and openly testified his hope that the Prince of Orange would save the nation therefrom. The Vernons, on the other hand, though members of the National Church, were yet naturally in favour of their Royal Godfather. Matters reached a crisis on the eve of the intended landing of the Dutch Prince, when Sir Thomas, who had equipped a small band of men at his own expense, gave notice that he should march into Devonshire at its head, and that, before departing, he should expect Evensong to be attended in St. Edith's Chapel by all the members of his family.

In vain old Isaac Cloke besought his master to remember that Evensong before marching to battle had always betokened disaster to his house. Sir Thomas was firm, and made known, moreover, to Sir James and his brother that further continuance in his favour depended on their presenting themselves on that occasion among the Squires of Lullingham, and afterwards marching with him into Devon.

The evening came. Around St. Edith's Chapel stood men-at-arms bearing lighted torches, while, for the third time, seven warriors knelt armed upon the pavement. On either side of the Squire's Pew the banners of the House of Polhill drooped their rich folds. There, too, was Lady Bridget, and by her side the "Roses of Lullingham," with cheeks whose bloom was heightened by the excitement of the hour. Evensong was sung; the stately party withdrew in silence at its close; and the chapel was left in darkness.

More than an hour elapsed, and then a single torch, lit as if by magic, appeared above the altar in the chancel. The side door communicating with the castle opened, and Bride Polhill came forth clad in a dark riding-habit, and leaning on the arm of Mistress Joan. She was deadly pale, and would have fallen had not Sir James Vernon advanced from the shadow of the pew and placed his strong arm around her. Out of the vestry a priest glided noiselessly in his surplice, and began reading the marriage service. The deep voice of Sir James and the faltering accents of his betrothed sounded strangely in reply, and in a few moments the young man bent proudly to kiss the cheek of "Lady Vernon."

The signing of the register by the dim light of the single torch had hardly been accomplished when the cry of "To horse!" from the Castle yard, reached the ears of the little group. Again the side door opened, and, passing through it, the party hurried along a narrow corridor to a small entrance which opened into the Court. There the trembling bride was lifted to a horse, and, with an attendant, rode slowly forward, while her husband remained behind to fall into the Squire's train.

But, as the moonlight shone clear and cold into St. Edith's Chapel, two figures might yet be discerned standing in the shadow.

"You give me up, Joan," said Charles Vernon's voice, reproachfully.

"No," she replied, "I do not give you up. I promise to be yours till death, but I cannot be ungrateful to my sister, and go forth without her blessing."

"Yet you led her daughter to the altar," he retorted bitterly.

"I did," she answered, "but it was for her mother's sake no less than hers. How could she have borne the shame of knowing that her child had fled forth in the darkness of the night unwed."

"And for her mother's sake the chaplain married her, I suppose," he said, scornfully.

"No!" she replied. "You know well, Charles, that John Leonard hath been like a brother to us ever since we were children. He did it for Bride's sake, that she might not be married by a Popish priest, as your brother threatened. But do not part in anger," she added, with pleading eyes.

"Come back right soon to claim me."

"I will, my darling," he replied. "I fly now only because the House of Vernon must never be divided. But I promise thee to come back again and wed thee in this chapel." And, covering her pale cheek with kisses, he hurried forth.

The mystery of Bride Polhill's stolen marriage has been partly explained by the words of Mistress Joan. A letter from King James had determined his elder godson to throw in his lot with the fugitive Monarch, and even to change his faith. Purposely dissembling till after Evensong, he then, for the first time, communicated his decision to the astonished girl, and bade her choose between her duty to her parents and her vow to her betrothed. The time for decision was short, and to Bride's passionate love nothing appeared so dreadful as the eternal separation foretold by her lover did she hesitate. She fancied that she might rely upon the doting love of her father for an early reconciliation, and even urged Joan to yield to the entreaties of Charles Vernon and fly with her. But

nothing could shake Joan's gentle steadfastness or her personal loyalty to Lady Bridget, though she would not betray her niece's confidence. And, foreseeing the shame and horror which would possess her parents if their daughter should consent to what they would hold an unlawful marriage by a Popish priest, she even joined her request to that of James Vernon that John Leonard should wed them in St. Edith's chapel.

Lady Vernon was conveyed by a trusty servant of her husband to a sequestered spot near the road by which her father's troop must pass. Here Sir James and his brother joined her. The morning light beheld them arrived at Faversham, and disclosed to the Squire the absence of the two young men; in hot anger he disdained to make inquiries or retrace his steps, and the terrible truth was only made known to him after his arrival at Torbay.

Meanwhile Joan had revealed all to her sister, and Lady Bridget, though at first disposed to reproach her, could not help being thankful that the shame of a secret flight before she was Lady Vernon had thus been spared her daughter.

Both Joan and John Leonard were tacitly forgiven; but, contrary to Bride's earnest hope, her father was never heard to name her again. Rumour attributed this, perhaps truly, to Lady Bridget's influence; but however this might be, the White Rose of Lullingham was from that day reckoned in her father's castle as a withered flower, and it was only the strong love of Winifred Cloke, aided by her foster-sister, which preserved her memory from oblivion by the Christmas garlands round the Western Stall.

* * * * *

Twenty years passed, and during that time only two letters had been exchanged between the fugitives and Lullingham. In the first, Bride made known to Joan the dreadful news that Charles Vernon had been mortally wounded in the Battle of the Boyne, and that she and her husband had resolved to accompany King James to France. Joan acknowledged the tidings with a trembling hand, but wrote that, even in her desolation, she could yet thank God, since henceforth the conflict between Love and Duty was over, and every day would bring nearer the endless reunion with her betrothed to which she looked.

After the King's death a report reached the Castle that Sir James could not agree with the widowed Queen or her son, and that, if possible, he desired to make his submission to Anne Stuart. The hearts of Joan and Winifred throbbed at this intelligence; but it was not corroborated, although they learned that the Vernons had indeed quitted St. Germain's and gone to reside at an obscure village on the Norman coast. Beyond this nothing transpired. Joan Prendergast, lovely still, though her golden hair was streaked with grey, was the only one of their family left with the Knight and his wife, their four sons being all absent, the two elder married.

But now time brought round the fortieth anniversary of Sir Thomas's marriage, and a rumour spread through Lullingham that it was to be celebrated by a festival which should eclipse the former one. As Christmas approached, the details of the all-important ceremonial were gradually revealed to his eager listeners by Isaac Cloke. As before, a solemn service was to be performed, and all Sir Thomas's children were to be present in the Squires' Pew when the Creed was said, if they valued their father's blessing, or expected to be numbered among his heirs. Deep curiosity was felt by the villagers to know if the long-exiled daughter had been included in the summons, but on this point old Isaac either could not or would not satisfy them, and they interpreted his silence as an unfavourable omen.

CHAPTER IV.

While the kind hands of Winifred Cloke were busy wreathing the Western Stall, three travellers might have been seen on the road to Lullingham. They had journeyed from the coast, and a wagon, whose driver had been heavily feed for the purpose, had left them an hour previously at a small village where they hoped to have obtained horses. But the owner of the only hostel in the place had neither vehicle nor animal to put at their disposal, and, after waiting only for a slight refreshment, they proceeded on foot. Night was, however, rapidly coming on, and the cold was intense; the road was rough and dark, and soon the party, which comprised a lady and gentleman and little girl, were forced to return, chilled and weary, to the shelter of the little inn, there to wait till morning. Before long, the lady became so ill that her walking further, even after a night's rest, was evidently impossible, and her companion watched anxiously beside her, until, somewhat relieved, she fell towards morning into a troubled slumber. When she awoke, daylight was streaming through the uncurtained window, and she would have risen, but strength failed her.

"It is of no avail," she said; "I cannot reach Lullingham in time. It is my only chance of forgiveness, yet must I lose it after crossing the sea to gain it."

"No, mother," cried her child, fervently; "you shall not lose it. I will go instead of you."

"Ah, but," replied her mother, "the letter said expressly that *Bride Vernon* must stand in the Western Stall when the Creed was said, if she would win back her parents' blessing. And I cannot get there. It is hopeless."

"Mother!" exclaimed the child, "I am *Bride Vernon*, too! I will stand in your place in the West Stall and say the Creed. My grandfather will never find it in his heart to turn me away."

"What sayest thou, mon ami?" said Lady Vernon—for she it was—turning her face to the tall soldier who had been known in the Norman village as Colonel Vernon.

"I think she may go," he answered, with a glance of pride at the lovely child. "It would not do for me to enter the church, but I can go with her to the door, and she must do the rest, like the brave maiden that she is."

"Yes!" cried the little girl; "you may trust me. I know exactly where the Squires' Pew is. I will go straight to it. And I will wear the robe thou didst make for me of thine own silver brocade," she continued; "they will know then that I am truly *Bride Vernon*. But who will tend thee if we both go?" she added, sadly.

"Mistress Thorpe will wait on me," replied her mother. "I shall feel better once I know ye are on your way."

Just then Mistress Thorpe entered to say that Reuben Palmer's wife was going through Lullingham on her way to Semnocke, and would gladly give Madam's little daughter a place behind her. This was good news. Little *Bride* was speedily equipped, and lifted on Goody's pillion. The Colonel walked at her side.

At first all went well; but ere they had got half-way the usually sure-footed Dobbin slipped on a little frozen pool and fell heavily. *Bride* was unhurt; but the horse had rolled upon Goody Palmer, and her leg was broken. Colonel Vernon raised her gently; but the poor woman lay in a dead faint.

"Our cause is lost," he said aloud to the child. "I cannot leave her."

"It shall not be lost!" she answered, bravely. "Do thou return to the inn. I will go on alone."

"Nay," said he, "not alone. Ill might betide thee."

"God will guard me," she replied, solemnly. "The church lies yonder. I shall reach it safely."

Remonstrance was unavailing. The Colonel lifted the unconscious woman upon her horse, and turned the bridle. With a farewell kiss the little girl set off; but it needed all her brave spirit to keep her from losing courage when she found that she sank repeatedly in the heavy ruts. Snow began to fall, and the bridle-path along which she walked turned suddenly, as she could see, into a high road; while the church lay away in the fields some distance beyond her. Her mother had warned her of the frozen streams with which the pastures abounded; and her excitement became intense when, after climbing a stile and passing through the first field, she was aware that the bells had ceased ringing, and that the church clock (the gift of good Queen Bess) was striking eleven into the frosty air. She tried to run, and surely good angels must have helped her, so swiftly, notwithstanding her weariness, did she press along, until, leaving the fields and passing once more into a road, she was near enough to hear the voices of the villagers as they sang the "Te Deum." The pause which followed frightened her, for she dreaded lest they might be repeating the Creed. Her breath came fast; her heart beat so loudly that she could almost hear its throbs, as, straining every nerve, she still sped on. Once more the voices rose. Then, as she gained the porch, there was a sudden silence, and, taking up a stone, she knocked at the heavy oaken door.

Here we must leave her, while, putting back for an hour the hands of old Queen Bess's clock, we stand with all Lullingham to see the family procession issue from the castle, and pass along a boarded footway covered with red serge and crossed at intervals with arches of evergreen.

The grandchildren of Sir Thomas, ten in number, walked first, the boys habited like miniature men, in flowing wigs and gay waistcoats, the girls in flowered brocade and ruffles of point lace. Following their children walked Lancelot Polhill and his wife, Dame Alice; and Cuthbert with his wife, Catherine, then came sweet Mistress Joan between the two unmarried sons Edward and Hugh. And now the people strained their eyes hoping next to behold some figure bearing a resemblance to their own Mistress Bride; but they looked in vain. Sir Thomas and Lady Bridget brought up the rear, their guests closed after them, and the throng at a reverent distance followed.

St. Edith's Chapel was filled to overflowing by the brilliant company, yet one place was kept conspicuously vacant—the West Stall, more richly garlanded than any other, remained without an occupant, Mistress Joan standing, as at the last festival, at its outer angle.

The jubilant strains of the old English carol, "Nowell, Nowell!" rang through the church, and then the reading of the service began. The villagers could see that Mistress Joan was weeping silently. Not, indeed, with Lady Bridget's sanction, but by Sir Thomas's direction she had written the letter of which Lady Vernon spoke inviting her return, and, though no answer had come back, she had fondly hoped till now that the response would be given this day in her niece's presence. Near her stood Sir Thomas and his wife, the former flushed and restless, the latter stern and cold as if she would shut out the remembrance of her daughter from her heart.

The morning, bright in its commencement, had overclouded, and as the service proceeded snow began to fall. "Te Deum" was sung, the reading of the Second Lesson followed, and then the choir burst forth into the hundredth Psalm. There was a moment's pause before the "Gloria" at its close, and in that moment those who sat nearest the north door became aware that someone was knocking at it with a persistent though feeble hand.

As the last strains of the "Gloria" died away the knocking became louder and louder, as if the suppliant gathered strength from fear; and at length Isaac Cloke left his seat, and amidst a breathless silence strode down the church and lifted the heavy latch. The tones of an expostulating voice were heard, and after a brief parley the old man threw the door open and stepped aside. Not only the rustic throng, but those in St. Edith's Chapel bent forward, amidst a hush painful in its intensity, to gaze at the unlooked-for worshipper, and lo! up the middle aisle there walked a little girl some eight or nine years old.

The scarlet cloak which covered her was flecked with snow, and from its hood curls of a rich dark brown fell on each side of a childish face, and matched in colour the large, wonderfully beautiful eyes which threw a frightened yet half daring glance around. She looked inquiringly up the church as if seeking some familiar object; then, catching sight of the lofty pinnacles of the Squires' Pew, she hastened forward, only pausing when she reached its entrance rail.

Dame Alice's youngest son, yielding to an involuntary impulse, opened it before her, and, mounting the stone steps, she stood, in sight of all, before Sir Thomas and his wife. The Knight seemed overcome with surprise, and could not speak; but Lady Bridget, summoning all her pride, asked, in a clear, cold voice, "Who art thou?"

"Bride Vernon!" answered a sweet voice; and as the child spoke, she threw off her scarlet cloak.

A dress of silver brocade appeared underneath, a little tarnished, but embroidered with crimson and scarlet cherries of such bright hues that they might only have been worked yesterday. A silver chain hung round the little neck, and from it was suspended a locket containing the miniature of a young girl with dark eyes and raven hair.

For a moment Lady Bridget lost her self-command; then the stern look returned to her face, and the child, perceiving it, fell on her knees and turned imploringly towards Sir Thomas. The old Knight's hands trembled as he stretched them forth to raise her; but before he could do so Mistress Joan had stepped from her cushion, and, taking the astonished child in her arms, she lifted her, before the eyes of all, into the Western Stall. At the same moment the recitation of the Creed began.

The loud voices of the congregation seemed to grow softer by common consent, that the silvery tones of the child might be distinguished. With a slightly foreign accent, she repeated it correctly to the end; then, kneeling on her cushion, she joined in the Lord's Prayer. As John Leonard uttered the petition, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us," Joan glanced up, and say that the arm of Lady Bridget had encircled her little grandchild, and that they knelt together. At the close of the service, the people crowded to see the return procession, and as Sir Thomas and Lady Bridget came forth, leading *Bride*'s child between them, there arose a ringing shout. Snow fell thickly as they passed again beneath the arches of evergreen; but no wintry air could chill the hearts which had been melted and made warm by forgiveness, happiness, and love.

"Thy mother is pardoned in thee, darling child!" said the old Knight, as he raised his little granddaughter in his arms, and, kissing her tenderly, placed her beside him on the dais. But the banquet, though ready, was not served until the great old coach had been got out, and Mistress Joan, under the escort of her youngest nephews, had set out therein to bring back his long-lost child. At the Christmas feast they learned from little *Bride* that within the last few weeks her mother was a widow.

Darkness had begun to fall, and the torches were lit, before Lullingham bells, which had been ringing all day, pealed

forth a yet louder peal as the state coach passed again under the old gateway of the castle. There was a murmur of excitement in the hall, and then Lady Vernon entered, leaning on the arm of Joan, and threw herself at her parents' feet, to be raised by them with tears and benedictions.

But if, as her long black robes betokened, she was, indeed, a widow, who was it that stood behind her, close to Mistress Joan, so strangely like Sir James Vernon?

Ah, Joan! good, faithful heart. Thy hour of joy has come! Charles Vernon did not perish of his wound, though after thy sad words he would not break thy heart's meek rest until he could return to wed thee. And thy long years of patience shall be rewarded now!

That night Winifred Cloke ministered again to the foster-sister whom she had loved so faithfully; and Bride Vernon, with the child who had won her pardon beside her, lay down in the home of her fathers. All was forgiven; but the error of their youth had wrought its own chastisement; after twenty years of exile her husband slept in a foreign grave, and might not share her joy.

But a Christmas tale should always end right merrily; and once more I will ask my readers to come with me to St. Edith's Chapel, where, while the New Year's bells ring joy, the Squires' Pew is filled again with a goodly company, and at the altar kneels sweet Joan Prendergast by the side of Sir Charles Vernon!

NELLIE'S DREAM.

(See Illustration.)

One Christmas Eve our little Nell,
Sated with sweets delectable,
And longing for a little quiet,
Away from all our madcap riot,
Stole gently to another room,
For peace within its gathering gloom;
And, with a shawl wrapt closely round her,
No maiden's sleep was ever sounder:
At least I think so: *she* avers
(Take which you like, my word or hers)
She saw and heard, in wakeful state,
The marvels that I now narrate.

First, looking through the window, she
By the fast-fading light can see
Some stragglers only, wading slow,
Yet cheerly, through banks of snow.
But—*hocus-pocus!*—soon the scene
Is changed as by a Fairy Queen.
The street, erewhile so dull, is rife
With sights and sounds of merry life.
Mis-shapen snowballs boys had made
Are all alive, with light arrayed;
Like turnip-lanterns urchins make,
To cause the little ones to quake.
And oh the saucy pranks they play;
A poor girl filling with dismay
Who crouches, on our doorstep sitting,
With all these snow-imps round her fitting.
They bend to her with courtier grace,
And, archly smiling in her face,
They wink and blink, and dance about,
The noisiest, merriest, maddest rout.
You never saw such funny creatures,
And all with the grotesque features;
Straight from their heads, like little pegs—
They have no bodies—come their legs.
This strange ice-pudding, bulbous race
Hold all wayfaring folk in chase;
Who feel their feet on sudden fail them,
Nor know what treacherous foes assail them;
Nor hear the elfish laugh hysterical
Outbursting from those gobline spherical.
E'en icicles slip from off the roof,
And from eaves-dropping hold aloof,
Disporting on their own behalf;
And boys and girls they follow after,
With tiny shrieks of tinkling laughter;
And join in many a wayward freak—
Now making necks with moisture reek,
Now cuddling 'gainst a dimpled cheek;
Or, greatly daring, taking sips
Of nectar straight from maidens' lips.
And strangest music everywhere
Is permeating all the air:
The snowball goblins hum a tune
As deep as that of the bassoon;
While castanets faintly played by icicles
Sound like the jingling bells of bicycles.

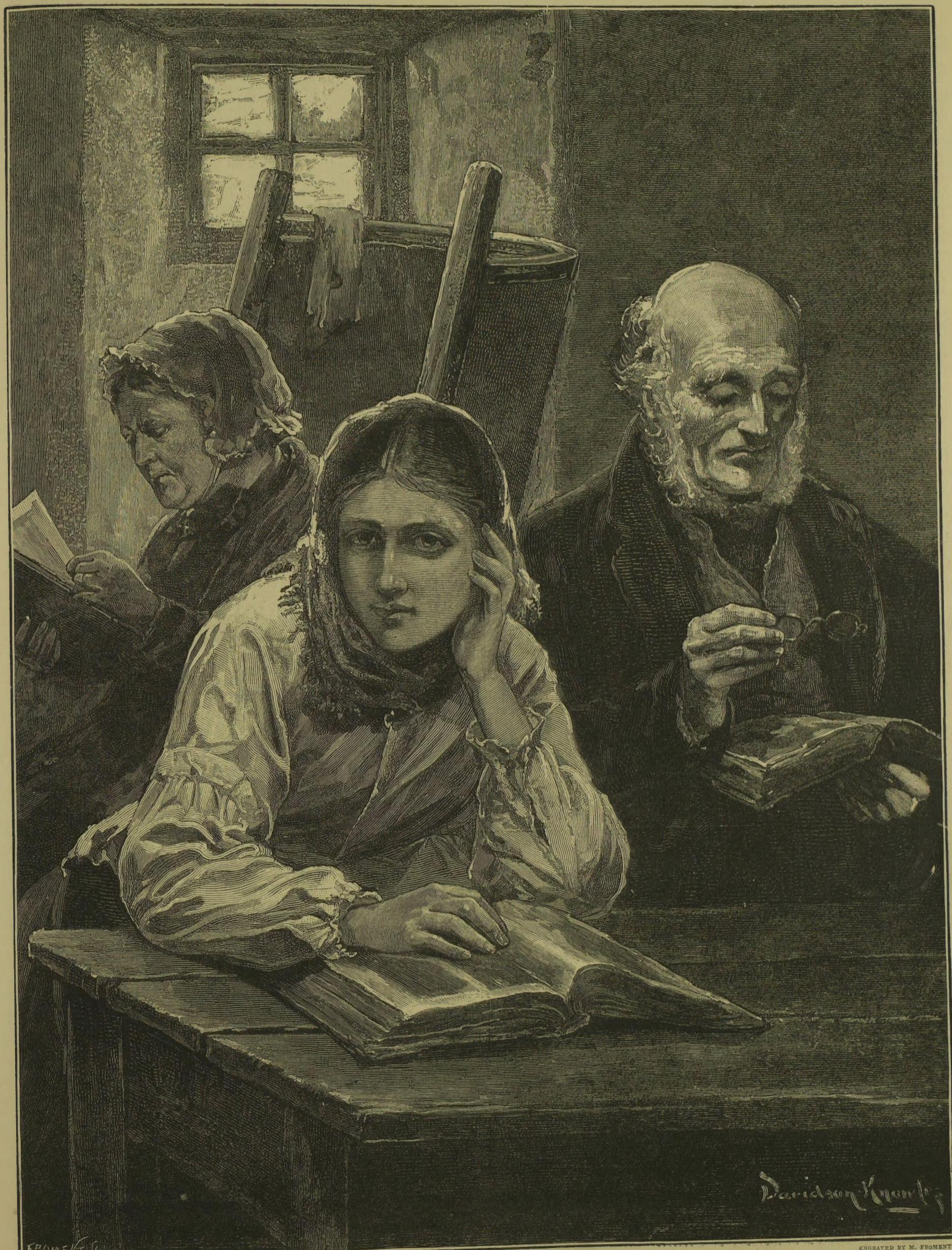
But suddenly the scene takes flight,
More quickly than it came to light;
Nell rubs her eyes with some surprise
As thus the fairy vision dies;
She looks into the quiet street—
No maiden now is on the seat,
The moon's mild rays are sweetly sleeping
Where imps their cantraps late were keeping;
And not a sound is louder heard
Than chirp of Nellie's little bird,
Or Polly on the hob susurring,
Or Pussy on the hearthrug purring,
Or now and then the clinking fall
Of red-hot cinders—that is all!

What was the talisman that broke
The charm her fancy did evoke?
The conjuror was her brother Freddy,
Loud-screaming—"Nellie, tea is ready!"

Thoughts of the girl vexed Nellie's breast:
Was she a phantom like the rest?
Or some forlorn one, doomed to roam,
Such bitter night, without a home?
Nell threw the front door open—Lo!
There lay the child, half-swathed in snow;
Stretched at full length, inanimate,
Like some fair corpse laid out in state.
Nell lifted, bore her to the hall;
Where soon, in answer to her call,
Flocked ready helpmates to her side,
Who prompt restoratives applied.
One brought hot soup within a minute,
With just a dash of brandy in it;
Another for the warm bath raced,
In which the fainting girl was placed:
Nor vain our efforts, for again
The lifeblood coursed through every vein.
So, what might else have been right tragical,
Was turned to joy by Love's might magical;
And having snatched from Death his prey
Made sweeter still our Christmas Day.

JOHN LATEY.





A COLLIER'S HONEYMOON.

BY JOHN SAUNDERS,

AUTHOR OF "ISRAEL MORT. OVERMAN," "ABEL DRAKE'S WIFE,"
"HIRELL," "THE TWO DREAMERS," &c.

CHAPTER I.

DRAWING TO A CLOSE.

"Not yet a month married; and he has horsewhipped me!"

Such, one dark wintry afternoon of November, were the broken exclamations, in a tone intense and concentrated to the last degree, uttered by Janet Daukes, the wife of a coal miner; while engaged in trying to wash away the bloodshot redness of her eyes, which had been brought on by hours of passionate weeping alternating with still more passionate outbursts of furious rage and thirst for vengeance.

She also strove to smooth her dishevelled hair, by the aid of the bed-chamber's broken glass; which was not the only sign of the quarrel and violence that after several preliminary warnings, had culminated to-day, before her husband went forth.

She was but seventeen, with a face naturally childlike, bright, and decidedly pretty, but now lowering and dangerous; such an aspect as often comes in external nature before a storm—here it came after one, and was only the more significant.

She began to rummage the handsome chest of drawers; one of the first things that the collier in meditating marriage takes care to secure; and having that, and an eight-day clock in a mahogany case, extending from floor to ceiling, he feels he has made good headway with regard to the entire subject of furniture.

Little in her present mood did Janet care for the beauty and costliness of anything she beheld in her domain; though something of her own bright spirit had seemingly passed into the face of the furniture, with the polish that her industry and pride were never weary of trying to improve.

She was thinking of quite other and more absorbing matters now. She drew forth her wedding gown, still as fresh in its white virgin purity as on the morning when the happy wearer acknowledged proudly to herself, as she took a last look in the mirror before going to meet her bridegroom, that her face and form were all she could reasonably desire to give to the man to whom she had already given her heart.

Madly taking hold of the gown by the two arms, she rent it asunder from top to bottom, threw the pieces on the floor, stamped on them, and appeared to take a dreadful pleasure in soiling them with her thick boots, while repeating in thought her former words:—

"Not yet a month married; and he has horsewhipped me!"

Thus stimulating herself to go on in the path that was gradually becoming clear to her eyes, she presently took from a drawer some withered flowers. They had been given on occasions so sweet to her that she had often since felt they were more beautiful in their decay, through all they recalled, than any that might come to her fresh from Nature's bountiful lap.

But the pitiful look of the withered blossoms seemed now such a symbol of herself as to touch deeper chords of emotion; and before she knew what she was about she had dropped on the floor rather than seated herself there, clasped her hands over her head, and burst into an ecstasy of tears, sobs, and hysterical laughter; and for some minutes could do nothing else.

But recollecting herself at the first moment of calm, and finding the flowers still in her hand, she laid them, in all the sentiment and pathos of a mourner at the grave, gently on the soiled and torn wedding-gown, which she pushed closer together to make a raised and smooth cushion for them, saying,—

"As ye are henceforth dead to me, so will I be henceforth dead to him!"

Collecting her thoughts, she saw only three things remaining to do. The first was to dispose of her wedding-ring, which she did by tying it to the flowers.

The second was to write on a label, as well as her indifferent penmanship and worse spelling would allow, the words,—

"A wife's gifts to her husband."

She then attached the label to the ring and the flowers, and laid them on the bridal dress, and all that part of her work was over.

There remained the collection of her own personal belongings, which she was so careful to confine to articles it was impossible to question that she suffered as from a galvanic shock on discovering at the last moment in her little tiny box of cheap jewellery a gold stud belonging to her husband. The man who could horsewhip his wife, no matter for what cause or in what state he might happen to be at the time, was fast becoming in Janet's eyes a monster, who would not hesitate to send the police after her as a thief if he missed anything. She placed it, therefore, in a conspicuous part of the mantelpiece, where it must be seen.

She possessed a large basket like a handsomer sort of carpenter's tool-basket, which she had been accustomed to use for her weekly marketings. The bright happy face of the young wife, proud of her duties and of the manner in which she could fulfil them, then came like an attractive vision to the shopkeepers' dingy counters; and always left behind some remark, so happily fitted to the occasion, and spoken with such piquant audacity as to give all the effect of the choicest wit or humour. These sayings speedily went the round of the miners' cottages, through all China, and thence right on to Constantinople; for so were the two principal ranges of the colliers' dwellings called. Why, only a new *Edipus* could tell.

In this basket she packed securely all her henceforth worldly wealth of dresses, boots, linen, and the rest. She lifted it; the basket was very heavy. But she would get help when she had got fairly away from home, and—

Home! Oh, the magic power that may lie in a single strain of music for the heart or brain already prepared! But how much more potential may be the sound and sense of a single word!

Home! Well, she had known for the last hour she was going to leave it—that it would never more be hers. That determination remained unaffected by a shadow of a doubt. Perhaps for that very reason she felt it only natural to dwell now, at this last moment, on thoughts and feelings sternly forbidden before. But dangerous as are the subtleties of the brain, it may be questioned whether those of the heart are not still more perilous in times of critical resolve.

That word "home" had scarcely sounded and resounded again and again in Janet's heart before all that the word had comprised for her in her days of romantic love; and thence onward through the times of declaration; acceptance; and the fixing the bridal day, with all the arrangements necessary for so august an event, but only after the most careful forethought and deliberation; but which were so pleasant, that neither would have cared to hurry them over.

All this lived again for Janet, but with even a keener sense of the original delight than it had been possible to her to have experienced. Surely, it is an unfailing subject for wonder, to see how in extreme unhappiness the mind can and will torture itself by recalling all it should forget; as if perfectly unconscious of its motive or desire—to display by contrast with the brilliant past the deepening midnight of the present.

She sat down in the nearest chair, a rocking-chair, and began to sway to and fro, finding in each advance and retreat some material for comment upon her own conflicting thoughts; and satisfying herself by the reflection that she did not hesitate, but was simply waiting for the darkness of night, that was now rapidly coming on, before opening her door for the last time, to pass away from the neighbours unseen; some of them very dear to her, whom she did not dare to speak to or be questioned by.

Thus passed nearly half an hour, when she suddenly became aware she was drifting back to the old state of things; and at once broke the toils by a vigorous leap to her feet, and by slinging the basket over one shoulder to her back, repeating in thought the while, as if to harden her every faculty,—

"Not yet a month married; and he has horsewhipped me!"

She smiled then, for the first time. And what expression a smile can give poor Janet's face would have revealed now, had there been any spectator to see. It was the kind of smile that we can imagine to have come upon the countenances of some of the forlorn ones of the world on meeting for the first time with Dante's inscription over the portals of hell—*"Abandon hope all ye who enter here!"*, while thinking that Dante himself had failed to conceive of those who had not even a hope left to abandon.

With that smile on her face, she opened the door and went forth.

CHAPTER II.

DARE-DEVIL DAUKES.

Her basket on her back, Janet strode on with a proud step, unhesitating purpose, and determined will, past the long row of her neighbours' cottages, meeting no one, and so reached the open country.

Her state of mind was in one respect truly remarkable. With all her faculties stimulated to the extremest degree by the quarrel and its consequences, and then driven inwards upon herself, and concentrated upon the brief but eventful half hour that had so affected her, she remained utterly forgetful, if she was not, indeed, profoundly unconscious, of the provocation she had given by her own reckless words: every one a sting that could not but rankle.

Neither did it occur to her to think of the truth, so important in many aspects to both her and her husband, that her violence in language, and his in act, were but the inevitable results of such a life as both had led from childhood. They were, unfortunately for themselves, members of that large body of the British public whom we call "Roughs"; and then, conceiving all is done by such a summing-up that the case requires, dismiss the subject from our legislative, or social cares; till some terrible act reminds us in its own wild fashion what sort of possibilities the word involves; and how needful it is for our own sakes that we break up, at any cost, the organised disorganisation that only speaks to us in deeds of disorder and brutal violence, crime and sickening cruelty.

But it is equally necessary for the so-called Roughs themselves, who are for the most part victims as well as offenders. They find—not make—the community in which they are trained: and only repeat on society the language, ways, and deeds that society has allowed to be taught to them. Happily, one grand step to a better state of things has been taken. Let but the Board School hunt up every one of these stray waifs of humanity in time, and not let them go till they have implanted the seeds of knowledge, and some feeling of the value to themselves of culture, discipline, and gentleness, and the Rough may cry "Ichabod—the glory has departed."

Had Janet been a person given to introspection, and possessed of a little literary talent to express herself, she might have feebly given a still stronger reason for the abolition of the rough—the thing and the name—by illustrating from her own experience how many of the men and women born under the régime are specially worthy of different and altogether opposite means of development; and who do sometimes break through their environments, and become admirable members of society—the inventive engineer, the gallant and prosperous soldier, the adventurous traveller in distant lands, winning his way, not by force, but by gaining the respect and affections of those who are—but in a sense very different from his own—still "roughs."

Janet would in the end have seen and felt that she and Dare-Devil Daukes were examples of this latter class.

She was, however, at present blind to all but her pro-vocation and purpose, which steeled her heart and her will.

A footpath stretched dimly before her, leading over a spur of the mountain slope. This she entered on without any slackening of her speed, ascended the ridge of the spur, and was descending on the other side, when she heard sounds in the distance like the mingling voices of men, and who seemed to be advancing towards her.

She stopped to consider what she would do. No doubt they were colliers returning home from the pits. Could her husband be among them? If he were, not only might there be a fresh scene of violence, as he discovered her purpose (which she would soon then to disguise), and which would be sure to lead to a public exposure of the outrage he had that day committed on her; one that might remain unknown if she evaded meeting him, for it was hardly probable he would trumpet forth his own disgrace.

As the voices became more distinct she listened intently, thinking she might recognise them, if they were not strangers. She soon satisfied herself her husband's was not among them, and was about fearlessly to move on, meet, and pass them, when a new fear arrested her steps.

If they were neighbours, and challenged her to speak in response to the customary "good-night!" they would know her by her voice, even if they could not otherwise distinguish her in the gloom. And to pass by without response would provoke their suspicion and invite attack. But if they did recognise her, they would stop to speak, suspect something wrong, and perhaps persuade or force her to return with them to her home.

She looked round to survey the position. A low stone wall was on the right of the path, while on the left the ground sloped away downwards into the darkness; through which nothing could be seen or heard near but the faint yellow colour and rustle of the decaying fern, and the bright flames issuing with a roar from the chimney of some ironworks, farther away.

It was the business of but a few seconds to drop her basket over the wall, and then lightly ascend and descend after it. Then, resuming her burden, she moved with stealthy step on her former course; intending, when the men should have passed her, to return to the path.

As they drew near she fancied there was something strange in the sound of their feet, and in the muffled tones of their voices. They moved neither with the rollicking pace of colliers in a jovial mood, nor with the heavy but varying footfalls of the same men when wearily returning home after their day's arduous labour, and thinking only of the comforts of the bright fire, the cosy hearth and chimney nook, the warm cleansing bath, and the tea and hot cakes to follow, which awaited them. What she heard was more like the methodical and concurring movement of men bearing a heavy burden.

Janet was in no mood to enter into the possible troubles or

the nightly adventures of other people, and was simply desirous to pursue her way undisturbed; and for that very reason she stood still, motionless, when she became aware they were not many yards off.

One of the men was speaking: she could not make out what he said, except the last few words,—

"Dare-Devil Daukes!" These were distinct enough; and Janet, hearing them, could hardly have been more startled by the apparition of the man they referred to, her husband, had suddenly stood before her in the path.

When she had reached this point, her quick imagination carried her on, and on, till she thought these men were carrying her dead husband—a suicide perhaps through shame! The mysteriously sounding movement of the men became at once a kind of dead march.

Well, if so, she had done with him; and all she had to think even just now was her own future career and fate. But she stayed where she was, even when they had passed by; and could with difficulty resist the impulse to look over the wall after them. The separate voices now came clearly to her. One—two—three—four—she counted in all; and recognised them as neighbours, or friends of her husband.

And still her feet seemed fastened to the spot as by iron bands. Presently one voice broke out of the low thick tones that had prevailed hitherto (as if in some deep feeling) and it was to cry,—

"I say, mates, put him down!"

"What for?" asked another.

"To light a match, and get a look at him; for it is my belief he's dying, if he ain't already dead," was the reply.

The procession came to a sudden stop. A light faintly illuminated the darkness. Janet then lifted her head and looked forth, but could see nothing but the shadowy forms, and the black ground on which he might be lying.

She was conscious of the folly of assuming that it was her husband who had been so spoken of—vexed with herself for caring whether it was him or not; but, all the same, she laid down her basket, and hurriedly, but with soft step and extreme care, retraced the ground, to where the procession was almost close to her, but still with the wall of defence between, with a break in it close by she had not before noticed, and a single step for persons to cross over.

The light was extinguished, and the men were holding a sombre council; courting, perhaps, the darkness that prevented them from seeing each other's faces, and so indirectly might aid each man to keep hidden his particular share in the trouble of the day, so far, at least, as those mute but expressive tell-tales were concerned.

Much of what had happened came out to Janet by degrees in their talk. She listened, spellbound, to the fearful story, which was made more awful by the gaps she saw between.

Briefly, what she learned now, or at a later time, may be thus told:—

"Jem Daukes," or, as he was more commonly called, "Dare-Devil Daukes," had come that afternoon to an alehouse frequented by the colliers, and there found these four men drinking, and arranging a dog-fight.

He seemed quiet and undemonstrative; took his seat in the darkest corner he could find, and showed a disinclination to talk when his nearest neighbour addressed him. These were traits so unusual as to attract the attention of all present; but when he was again addressed by the man who had before spoken, with a comment on his behaviour, and a query as to what was the matter, Daukes suddenly burst out with a volley of abuse, and warned him to mind his own business. The man responded in equally choice language, and was summarily knocked down. Then, as one of the other men rose to remonstrate, Daukes turned upon them all like a madman, or a Malay about to run amuck against all that portion of the world which might happen to come in his way, struck out right and left, till the four men, in self defence, fell upon him pell-mell, got him to the ground, and so seriously injured before reducing him to quietude that he became partly unconscious, and lay where they left him, unable to rise or move a limb, hardly even to speak.

Such rows, and such consequences, were not unfamiliar to the conquerors, and did not necessarily alarm them. It was, no doubt, an awkward affair; Daukes would lose a week or two's pay, but soon get right again, and be as lively as ever, while getting a useful lesson for the future. So thinking, and inclined to act in a spirit that might be either wisely prudent or nobly magnanimous, they resolved to take him home to his wife. Having obtained materials for an impromptu stretcher from the scared landlord, they plodded along with their burden, not caring much to talk lest they might come to loggerheads as to each man's particular share in so disabling

"Dare-Devil Daukes." They began, indeed, to feel uncomfortable when they found he would not—perhaps could not—answer their well-meant but jeering kind of comfort; and at last were thoroughly awakened to their position by their mate's discovery that he was either dead or dying. The funereal march was then suddenly stopped, and their late equanimity terribly shaken.

It was at this point that Janet was able to hear the following dialogue:—

"A pretty mess thou's made on it, Billy Martin!"

"Me! I never laid a hand on him!"

"No; thou thought it safer to wait till we had got him down, and then jump upon him."

"That's a lie, Jack!"

"Tell me that to-morrow, and I'll give thee an answer that'll quite satisfy thee."

Another voice now broke in,—

"What's the use, mates, of jawing at one another? If we are in a mess, will that get us out of it? What's to be done? That is what I want to know."

"Well," said Billy Martin, "the best thing I can think of is to fetch the doctor; and so I'm off!" And he moved as to go away.

"And I'll seek the wife," added Billy's satirical antagonist, Jack. And he also moved to follow.

"I say, Mac! See what they're after?" hurriedly remarked one of the men who were left behind.

"No—not exactly," was the wondering reply.

"Bless thy innocence! If they do go to the doctor and the wife they'll be taking a very short cut to the police station. If they don't, but go quietly home to their beds, while we wait here—two confiding creatures—they will leave us to be credited with the entire job. Oh, you understand now, do you?"

Before an answer could be given, a woman's voice, clear, penetrating, commanding, was heard to summon the two departing men, who were really the most implicated by their unnecessary violence after Dare-Devil Daukes' overthrow.

"Billy Martin! Jack Price! Stop! Both of you, till I, Daukes' wife, come to you. Stop, I say! You hear me, and you know me, and know that I know you; and many more beside shall know you if you don't come back!"

There was a hurried conference between the departing pair, both thinking of violence. And could they have been sure of the acquiescence of the other two men, Janet might have paid with her life for her interference and threat. It is a peculiarity of the Rough's nature to go rapidly to the most

tragical ends, without any such fixed intention at the beginning. As it was, they did return, taking great pains to explain to her, as if she had not already heard, the excellent purposes for which they were hurrying away.

"Is this really my husband?" Janet said to them, certain now these were the men who had most to fear from her, but also the men whose services could not be done without.

"Ay, Missus. Would you like to look at his face?" said Billy Martin, becoming at once polite and amiable.

"Please!" said Janet simply.

A match was then struck, and Billy Martin held the light very close to the pale, senseless face; while Janet, kneeling on the hard ground, tried by all the ways she could remember to have heard of, to make sure he was still alive and hopefully strong.

It was a strange picture that the matches, lighted in succession, revealed by glimpses upon the dark background of the night. The senseless body on the ground, its head raised by the form of the stretcher; Janet's intense face of inquiry; and the four men standing around, and stooping the better to see the quality of their work, and to judge of their immediate prospects by the result.

"Are any bones broken?" Janet asked, turning to the two men she had not yet spoken to, and from whom she thought she might get the truest answer.

"No, Missus, we tried that," answered Billy Martin, before either of the men addressed could speak. Naturally, if he had jumped on Dare-Devil Daukes, the nature of the answer to be given concerned and much interested him. The men spoken to, however, confirmed the fact, so far as they had been able to discover.

"Well, he is certainly not dead—nor, I think, likely to die, if no time be lost. You may comfort yourselves with that. And I now tell you that, believing he was the first to begin, I will take no part against you, nor allow anybody else, on my behalf, if you now fulfil your own kindly purpose and take him to his home. Now, then! take him up carefully, and let us go."

They were about to obey, when she stayed them, in order to tell "Mac," one of the men who were to have been the scapegoats for the others, to go through the gap in the wall near by, turn to the left, and he would find, about a dozen yards off, her basket, which she had been carrying when she left the path, not knowing who were the folk she heard coming, whether friends or foes.

The basket was brought, and the bringer was desirous of having it fastened across his shoulders, chivalrously asserting he could carry it easily, while also helping to carry Daukes. But she dismissed the idea, almost with contempt, swung it from the ground over her shoulder, and gave the signal for a start, in a—

"Now then!"

Once only after that time was any voice heard from the slow moving procession. It was when they were approaching the houses, that she said to them,—

"It is so dark, that we may reach home without being seen, and then you all go away, leaving nobody the wiser. Cross to the wall, and they won't hear us inside the houses."

"All right, Missus," responded Billy Martin; much cheered by the behaviour of the woman whom at first he had thought likely to be dangerous.

They did reach Janet's door without meeting a single person, and deposited the still unconscious man on the floor of the house-place, or sitting-room, and were about to leave.

"Take him up stairs to bed!" cried Janet. "Stop! Let me go first."

She went quickly, whereas they could only slowly follow. The moment she reached the chamber she moved carefully from the centre of the room the "wife's gifts to her husband," by pushing them, undisturbed in their general arrangement, into an unoccupied corner; where she threw over them—the first article of covering she could lay hold of—a gay, not to say gaudy shawl.

Then she heaped up the pillows of the bed, and all was ready.

"About his clothes, Missus?" queried Billy Martin, as he came backwards into the room, supporting Daukes by the waist, while the helpless head of the Dare-Devil rested on Billy's chest; and Jack followed with the legs.

"Best not meddle till the doctor has seen him," replied Janet, as she helped to lay him on the bed.

"Well, Missus, I know you think hardly of me, but I'm d— if I don't go for the doctor, whatever happens."

Strange to say, this handsome piece of self-sacrifice called forth a murmur not of approval, but of grumbling dissent, followed by a distinct intimation that if he went the others would all go, too. In fact, they did not hesitate to conceal their opinion that Billy Martin was cunningly bent on making the best of things for himself.

"Men, my husband may die, while you are discussing who is to be the instrument of saving him. Why should you not all go—tell the truth, and find the manliness of your behaviour your best defence now, and hereafter?"

With a fitful gleam of enthusiasm kindled by her look, words, and entire attitude, since she had confronted them on the mountain-side, they accepted Janet's advice; went off; decided by the way what should be said, and intrusted the saying of it to "Mac," the man whom all the others recognised as the least committed by any special violence in the affray—the man who wanted to carry Janet's basket.

CHAPTER III.

"TAKE THE SHAWL AWAY!"

The doctor lived some three miles distant; and the deliberation of the messengers on the road consumed time; but he was so much interested in what they told him that, his servant being out of the way, he saddled his horse himself, and trotted off at a rate that brought him in a few minutes to Janet's door, to which he fastened the animal, and went in.

In fact, the doctor had a liking for Dare-Devil Daukes, and was accustomed to say that when he had sown his very wild oats, if he only survived the process, he would surprise everybody: "There was the making in him of a fine fellow!"

After a cursory examination of his face and pulse, he asked Janet to tell him all she knew about the affair; for the only account he had received was more noteworthy for its diplomatic skill than for the fulness or frankness of the information given.

So she told him carefully and minutely every incident of her meeting with the men, and all that she had heard while her presence remained unknown; taking care to add that she had been obliged to acknowledge her husband as the aggressor, and therefore had given her word the men should not be meddled with by or for her.

He received her explanations silently, but with a glow on his face at her behaviour; then said,—

"We must get his clothes off and have him into bed before I examine him. I think we must slit them open, and so draw them away without disturbing him."

This was done, and the doctor made a minute and most careful examination of Dare-Devil Daukes' injuries. He found traces of a violent blow on the head, and to that he

attributed the long insensibility of his patient. Besides that, there were bruises on every part of the body, but none involving serious danger. On the whole, he was hopeful that the stupor would now soon pass away; and then the worst they had to reckon on would be that he might not be well enough to eat his Christmas dinner. But even as to avoidance of that calamity he augured well.

Giving her minute directions as to what she had to do, and as to keeping the patient quiet when he did show signs of revival, he left her.

Her first thought when he had gone was one of deep thankfulness, that he had no suspicion of the cause of her being on the mountain-side at that time of night, and so she had been spared the most painful explanations.

Dare-Devil Daukes was a bit of a humourist; and when Janet, after a time returning to the bed-chamber, saw him with his eyes open, and staring at her, she could not help wondering if he had been playing the doctor a trick; and had revived during his examination, but kept up the appearance of unconsciousness.

But it needed only a second glance for her to note the wildness of his look, as if he did not know her, or the place he was in, or what had happened, but was struggling to master the facts.

"Are you better?" she said, going to him, and about to take his hand, when some secret thought or feeling changed her purpose.

"Janet," he murmured.

"Ay."

"What's all this about?" There he stopped, unable to guide his thoughts or words farther.

"I will tell you presently." She poured out some medicine—a cordial or restorative the doctor had brought with him, and left for this express purpose. "Drink this."

He drank, his eyes all the while fixed on her face, as if he sought there to find at once the solution of the mystery that was delayed.

To avoid excitement, she made an excuse to leave him for a few minutes. But before she thought it wise to return, he was knocking with a stick placed for the purpose, so vigorously, that she hastened up, lest the old dare-devil spirit might be already tempting him to some dangerous effort, perhaps to get up.

"Janet," he shouted, while she was yet on the stairs.

"Coming! Coming!"

He had raised himself a little, so as to give him a better outlook, the dazed aspect had passed from his eyes, and his first words were,—

I'm starving; give me something to eat."

"I was getting something ready."

"And a pint o' mild ale."

"The doctor will object to that."

"The doctor! What doctor? D—— the doctor! I mean to have a pint of ale, and more after if I like."

"First let me tell you what apparently you yet don't know, or recollect. You went to the Jolly Colliers this afternoon after leaving me; got into a row with Billy Martin and other men; knocked one down; then fell foul of the whole lot, who had some difficulty to master you, and so hurt you that they brought you home senseless. The doctor has been—undressed you—finds a bad place on your head, and your body covered with bruises. And the end is, you are to be kept very quiet, and have no liquor of any kind."

"And do you mean to carry out his instructions?"

"I do."

"What if I say you sha'n't!"

"I shall act all the same!"

"There's a pretty beauty of a wife," said Daukes, as he replaced his head on the pillow, feeling too weak to pursue the matter further just then.

Suddenly he caught sight of the many-coloured shawl on the floor, in the corner, and took advantage of the fact to pretend a new interest that might cover his failure with the preceding one.

"What hast thou gotten under thy shawl, yonder? Think I gave two guineas for a dirt or rag cover?"

"Wouldst thou like to see what is under?"

"Take the shawl away!"

She obeyed him.

"Is that thy wedding gown?"

"Yes, torn and soiled as thou seest."

"By you?"

"Yes!"

"Here's a pretty beauty of a wife!" he again exclaimed. Then he became silent, as if measuring the ground before him a little, before again speaking.

"What's that on the top?" he inquired, after a minute or two's pause, during which he had been attentively surveying the little mount.

"My wedding ring, and the flowers you gave me the day you said you loved me."

"Was I such a fool?"

"That is for you to decide."

"And what were these things put there for?"

She fetched the label, and gave it to him to read, which he did, aloud:—

"A wife's gifts to her husband.' Upon my word! Here is a pretty beauty of a wife! But Janet, woman, I want to know what you haven't yet told me—why that label and those things were put there."

"Because, Jem, I had made up my mind to leave you for ever."

"But had one bit of sense left to make you change your mind?"

"No. I did go; but fell in with your companions, and had to interfere to make them bring you home; when, in alarm at your state, they were all about to leave you on the hill-side."

"I wish you had left me!"

"I don't."

"Why?"

"Because it lets me show I bear you no malice before I again go from this house."

"You mean to leave me?"

"Not till you are well."

"But then?"

"Yes."

"Well, you are a precious beauty of a wife!"

Somehow Janet began to notice that these successive repetitions of attack on her character seemed to show more of enjoyment than of wonder, resentment, or disgust. And to prevent undue influence upon her, and consequent weakening of her resolve, which she had never for a moment changed, she abruptly left him.

For many days nature and disease had a harder struggle over Dare-Devil Daukes' frame than could have been imagined from his first revival. But more was passing within than the shrewdest friend could have possibly supposed. From the moment of the outrage on his wife he had been a prey to the wildest passions that can beset a man. At once deeply ashamed, and still full of resentment;—wishing he could say and do something to set things right, but too proud and violent to bend in submission;—he had, as a last resort against

the many evil impulses that were threatening to carry him away, gone to the public-house, meaning only to listen and get calm, but had soon found his mistake.

His long consequent illness made more terrible the knowledge of his wife's purpose.

He had at first treated the matter as a good joke, while liking the spirit it displayed. But that soon died out as he saw the fixedness of her resolve. A new resentment then silenced for a time all his remorse and desire for a reconciliation.

Yet, all the while he could not but dwell, with ever-increasing admiration, on her heroic behaviour with the men, which the doctor delightedly narrated to him, and with reviving and deepening love on her exemplary fulfilment of the duty she acknowledged.

Thus ill—and thus agitated—no wonder he was not declared convalescent till just one week before Christmas.

"So, my boy, you will eat your Christmas dinner with your jewel of a wife; and I wish you joy on both accounts."

At that very time Daukes knew that his wife was silently and unostentatiously, but not secretly, preparing to depart; and that no such banquet for soul and body awaited him, unless—

What that "unless" meant of still existing hope, however feeble, must be shown in another and brief chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

"NOW STRIKE!"

Janet had seen with deep feeling the sadness that overspread her husband's face, just when his health and strength were reviving. But he had said nothing—showed no desire to say anything—of such a character as might even induce her to question herself, and think of forgiveness and reconciliation. The insult—the degradation—had sunk too deep to be done away with by any means that Janet knew of, short of a revolution in the very character of her husband that it never occurred to her to expect.

She was therefore greatly surprised, and for the moment received a terrible shock, when Daukes came to her early one morning in the room below, where she had slept ever since the day of her humiliation, bearing in his hand the very horsewhip he had used upon her body.

She was up and dressed. Fearfully pale, but composed and stern, she confronted him, and then waited to see what this meeting portended.

"Janet," he began, "while you were out last night, an odd thing happened; the Postman brought me a letter!"

"A letter!" responded Janet, echoing his own surprise.

"Ay; here it is," he said, taking it from his pocket. "It tells me our Overman has gotten a better place; has been saying a good word for me; so the agent says I may have the post. What dost thou think?"

"It's no business of mine."

"What, not if I tell thee there will be larger wage, and if I tell thee a secret besides?"

Janet remained determinedly silent, so he could only go on—

"While I've been lying a-bed all these weeks I've been thinking of the doings of a man who began like me, a collier in the pit, made himself a bit of a scholar, was made Overman, then became Agent, bought one pit after another, and at last became a Parliament man, and they do say he'll be made a Baronet.

"Now even a humble fellow like me, may pick something good and reasonable out of such a story. I am Overman. Why shouldn't I go to Old Glory, the schoolmaster, as we call him, because he so often talks of the glory of knowledge; work hard, live hard for a while, save money, and bit by bit get at last to be an Agent myself, and have a nice place for thee, and a big garden full of the flowers thou liktest best, and all the folk looking up to thee?"

"Did the man you talk of begin by horsewhipping his wife?" said Janet at last.

She trembled when the words were out, but Daukes met them with a laugh, which soon ceased, and his face became as Janet had never seen it before.

"Janet, I suppose the biggest fools do get some odd moments of wisdom, or what would become of them? I think I got one such yesterday. And I am going to tell you what it was. But I first want to say two or three things; and I don't care to spoil them by excuses as to what you did or did not say to provoke me when I struck you.

"The first thing I have to say is that it was an unmanly act, and one that I can never right myself about if you don't help me.

"Next I want to beg your pardon, as I do now, on my knees; and I don't think there is another woman in all the world I would do as much for!"

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ENGRAVED BY M. PANNEMAKER.

FROM THE PHOTOGRAPH BY MESSRS. DOWNEY.

THE FAVOURITE.

THE DUKE'S PLANTATION.

BY CUTHBERT BEDE.

CHAPTER I.

THE DUCHESS'S CHRISTMAS BALL.

"Thanks! no! never mind putting up the step. I have not a second man with me, and the step is best left down, as I shall have to get out to open a gate."

"All right, Sir. Have the window shut, Sir?"

"No, thanks! This curtain is sufficient."

"Good-night, Sir. Very much obliged, Sir." This last was from one of the Duke of Melton's under-grooms, who had attended Mr. Collingwood to his carriage, and had just received from him a tip. And the carriage drove out of the courtyard of Mowbray Castle, with Mr. Collingwood inside and old Peters, the coachman, on the box.

The carriage was a covered waggonette, with the door in the rear, and the steps let down behind. As events turned out, it might have been better if Mr. Collingwood had allowed the Duke's groom to fold up the steps; but they dangled down behind the carriage as if drove out of the courtyard and turned for the oak avenue. Other carriages were coming round; lamps were lit in every direction, even along the various avenues in the park, although the night was not very dark; but there was no snow on the ground, and in many places the gloom of the groups of timber might have made it difficult for the coachmen to mark the various turns in the labyrinths of drives, without some little more light than that afforded by their own carriage-lamps. Oil-lamps and open braziers of blazing wood were, therefore, placed at certain points, and the effect of the illumination of the wintry landscape, with the undulating ground, the gnarled boughs, and the startled deer, had a weird and striking effect. The Castle windows were ablaze with light; the Duchess's Christmas ball was not yet over; and the sound of music was plainly audible from the ball-room as Cuthbert Collingwood drove away.

Christmas Day had been on the Tuesday, and this was the Thursday night—or rather, by this time, it was a little past two on the Friday morning. Next day, in fact, would be Saturday, for which he had just accepted an invitation; for the Duke had said to him, "We are going to shoot the Big Wood on Saturday, and I hope that you will join us there at twelve. I hear a good report of the pheasants; and there ought to be some woodcocks in that lower part, towards the small lake, just under the Duke's Plantation." And Mr. Collingwood had promised to be there. He had got away as soon as he decently could after the supper, and was one of the first to leave; and when making his adieux to his hostess, she had said, "So good of you to come. I hope that Mrs. Collingwood will go on well, and the baby. Pray give her my best congratulations." He bowed over her Grace's hand, and excused himself for leaving so early, on the plea that he did not wish to be away from home longer than he could help.

This was indeed the case; and it was only by great persuasion on his wife's part that he had been induced to accept the Duchess's invitation, and to put in an appearance at her ball, which was an annual Christmas event and one of the great gatherings in the county. Everyone in society was invited to that ball, when the Duke filled the Castle with guests for a succession of sports by day and balls and dinners by night; the shooting and hunting—unless skating took the place of hunting—giving a pleasant alternation to the amusements of each day. Of course, people in the position of Mr. and Mrs. Collingwood, of Foxcote Hall, were sure to be asked to the Duchess's ball, though they visited at Mowbray Castle on other occasions. He was the representative of an old county family; was a man of property and position—a county magistrate, and a captain in the local rifle corps. Altogether, though a young man of eight-and-twenty, he was a man of mark in that neighbourhood; and the wife whom he had married, fourteen months before, was a Dean's daughter.

Her mother, Mrs. Bulkeley, was now staying at Foxcote, and had been there for the last fortnight, ever since the interesting event that had made him the father of a little daughter. He would have stayed away from the Duchess's ball, if he could have had his own way; but he was not allowed to have it; the ladies ruled, and they decided that her Grace's invitation should be answered in the affirmative so far as the head of the house was concerned. Mr. Collingwood had endeavoured to parry the question, and to aver that the real head of the house, by that time, might be a son and heir. But he was overruled; and, as the Dean's wife afterwards said to him, "After all, Cuthbert, you see that Dombey and Son is a daughter." Yet the young husband was no less proud and thankful for the possession of that pretty Christmas gift of a daughter, though he could have well wished to absent himself from Mowbray Castle, when affairs had so arranged themselves that he could not go there in the company of his wife. But he declared that he would leave the ball early, immediately after supper, and that he would not take Clarke, the footman, but only old Peters, the coachman; and that he would try not to disturb the household on his return home in the small hours of the morning.

"I am rather vexed that you cannot go with me, Amy," he had said to his wife, when he took leave of her. "You would enjoy the ball so much, and you wished to see"—Here he mentioned a name nearly connected with Royalty, the owner of which name was to be present at the Duchess's ball.

"Never mind, dear! you must tell me how she was dressed."

"I fear that will be quite beyond my powers; but I will do my best."

"It is a pity that you cannot use the brougham."

"Rather, it is a happy thing that it needs going to the coachmaker just now. It will be ready for you by the time that you are well enough to take a drive. I shall do very well with the covered waggonette."

"But why not take Clarke with you?"

"I don't really want him. I shall drive straight up to the doors of the Castle. On a night like this, all the park gates will be kept open by watchers, and I shall have no need to get out to open any gate until I come back to my own, so my shoes will be quite presentable when I find myself on the parquet floor of the Duchess's ball-room."

So, with kisses to his wife and baby, Cuthbert Collingwood had gone away from Foxcote to Mowbray Castle; and, after some talk with her mother, Mrs. Collingwood had gone to sleep, in order that she might awake about three in the morning, when she thought to hear the sound of the carriage wheels, or of the dogs barking in the yard to announce her husband's safe return. She heard both sounds—the roll of the wheels and the clatter of the horse's hoofs on the hard gravelled drive, and also the sharp barking of the disturbed dogs in their kennels; but she listened in vain to hear her husband's foot on the corridor as he passed her room on his way to his own.

CHAPTER II.

DRIVING HOME FROM THE CHRISTMAS BALL.

When the covered waggonette, with its solitary occupant, had got away from the glare of the lights in the park avenues, and

had passed through the outer lodge, the road from that point to Foxcote Hall was exceedingly lonely. It was a seven mile drive, four miles of which were past woods and plantations, with no cottage or farmhouse, or any building or habitation to break the monotony of the road. For the greater part of the way the road was not very good at the best of times, and, at Christmas, it was always rough with the stone that had been freshly put down, and was not broken up so small as it might have been.

"I hope," thought the occupant of the waggonette, "that Peters has kept himself sober, and has not had too much of that old ale that was brewed at Lord Stapleford's christening. At any rate, I hope that he won't go to sleep so far as to tumble off the box. I took the precaution to have Cyrus put in the shafts. He's a reliable old horse; and when once he's got his nose turned towards his own stable, he'll go steadily on, driving or no driving. I don't want to turn out on the box this cold night, and drive myself home."

Two small windows in front of the covered waggonette enabled Mr. Collingwood to see that his horse was going along at a steady pace, and he could also get a glimpse of his coachman, who was not asleep, though he seemed to be drowsy; but he held the reins properly, and now and then mechanically lifted his whip-hand to keep Cyrus up to his work. Not that Cyrus needed the whip, or that it made any difference in his pace when the lash gently touched his flank; he and old Peters knew each other's ways and habits. There was a half glass door at the back of the carriage, the glass part fastening back when it was not needed; and there was an inner curtain of thick crimson baize. This curtain was usually preferred to the glass door by Mr. and Mrs. Collingwood, unless rain should be beating into the carriage, as it made the interior of the waggonette better ventilated, and yet sufficiently closed from draughts. The front window behind the coachman could also be slid back when it was needed.

On the present occasion—and these details proved to be of importance—Mr. Collingwood had, as usual, placed open the upper glass part of the door, and had drawn the red baize curtain over the aperture, leaving the hind steps hanging down. He had an overcoat, and had wrapped round him a large fur rug, so he felt comfortable and warm as he glanced through the front and side windows and saw the flicker on the trees and hedges from the lighted lamps of his carriage. There was no snow on the ground. There had been a deep fall about a fortnight previous, which had interrupted the hunting for a week; but it had all disappeared, and it had been a green Christmas. It was, however, frosty and cold, as befitted the season; and the waggonette's wheels and old Cyrus's hoofs rolled and clattered over the hard, stony road, and must have been heard for a considerable distance if there had been anyone to hear them in that lonely part of the country.

"Amy will see that I have kept my word," thought Cuthbert Collingwood. "I shall be home by three o'clock."

They had now got more than two miles on their way after leaving the park lodge. Mr. Collingwood nodded his head several times, and then looked out sharply through the front window to see if Cyrus was going on properly, and if old Peters was still awake. He then, thoroughly tired, succumbed to circumstances, and determined to have forty winks if the jolting of the carriage would allow him to do so. Perhaps the jolting soothed him, for, certainly, he slept hard, although the carriage had just then come to the worst and roughest bit in the road, the ascent of the sharp hill by the wood that was known as "The Duke's Plantation"—the spot where he would have to meet the Duke's shooting party on the morrow.

Now, it happened that, at nine o'clock on the previous night, when Mr. Collingwood had driven through his own lodge-gate on his way from Foxcote to the Castle, he had told old Joyce—who, with his wife, lived at the lodge and attended to the gate—that he need not sit up for him, as he should be late, and that he would open the gate for himself. Accordingly, when Peters pulled up at Foxcote Lodge, soon after the stable clock had chimed three, he expected to hear his master let himself out of the waggonette and open the gate. But, after vainly waiting for a minute or two, he gave a grumble that his master should have dropped off to sleep, and then got down from the box and opened the drive-gate. The carriage passed through, and Cyrus stopped at the word of command, until Peters was once again on the box. As he passed behind the waggonette he saw that the red baize curtain was drawn, and he concluded that his master was fast asleep behind it.

CHAPTER III.

THE WAGGONETTE MAKES A SECOND JOURNEY TO THE CASTLE.

Clarke, the footman at Foxcote Hall, was ready at the open door to receive the carriage. The rumble of the wheels and the quick trot of the horse along the hard, frost-bound road, had been distinctly heard for the last five minutes in the stillness of the early morning.

Mrs. Collingwood had herself heard the welcome sound as she lay awake in bed, with her baby beside her. Then there was the stoppage at the lodge, the roll up the drive, the barking of dogs in the yard, and the pulling-up of the carriage at the hall-door. Then she listened for Clarke to shut the door, and for the waggonette to be taken round to the stables; but no such sounds met her ears, though she listened anxiously for them. So did the Nurse, who was sitting up in her big chair by the fire.

Mrs. Collingwood was alarmed. "I am sure that there must be something wrong! Do go to the head of the stairs and see if Mr. Collingwood is in the hall."

The Nurse did so; and met Clarke the footman, coming up the stairs with a very blank expression of face. The tidings were conveyed in a few words. The carriage had come up to the door, but it had no occupant. Mr. Collingwood was nowhere to be seen, and he had not stopped the waggonette on its way in order to get out of it. Peters was positive that his master had got in at the Castle, and had not been accidentally left behind; but how, when, and where he had escaped from the carriage he was utterly unable to say. On further inquiry, although Peters indignantly denied the imputation of sleeping on his box, yet he confessed to having felt slightly drowsy during a portion of the drive home; but he was quite certain that if the horse had stopped, even for a few seconds, he should have been wide awake to his duties; and he was confident that the horse had kept on at his usual pace for the whole journey. Could the door have opened, and Mr. Collingwood have fallen out? No. Clarke testified to having found the door properly closed, and the red baize curtain drawn across. The valuable fur rug, however, was missing from the carriage; and Peters remembered it being put in when his master left the Castle.

All this was very mysterious; and poor Mrs. Collingwood went to her mother's room in an agony of terror, and aroused her to see what was best to be done. Happily, Mrs. Bulkeley was cool-headed, and could act on an emergency, while she strove to pacify her daughter and allay her fears. The two grooms and the gardener were sent for, and were told the state of affairs; and the waggonette, supplied with rugs, was had out and driven by the head groom. Mrs. Bulkeley decided that it was better not to let Peters make the journey, as he was

already tired. A fresh horse was, of course, placed in the waggonette, and the second groom and gardener were supplied with lanterns in order that they might see into the ditches on either side of the road, and proceed to any spot whence a cry of distress might meet their ears. Clarke accompanied them; and, driving slowly, and walking on each side of the carriage, the party of four searchers set out to go back, if need should be, as far as the Castle; while those in the house watched and waited.

Each side of the road was searched as they advanced. With their lanterns and the carriage-lamps, the view from hedge to hedge was quite clear; but nothing could be seen of their missing master. Not a soul did they meet; for at that Christmas time of the year it was too early for the labourers to be going to field-work, and only those would be astir who slept on the farm premises, and had to be up early to see to their horses and beasts. They went slowly and steadily on, every now and then calling out "Mr. Collingwood! Mr. Collingwood!" But there was no response, and no sound to break the stillness, except the barking of a fox or the crow of a disturbed pheasant. They went on thus as far as the Duke's Plantation, and down the hill, and it was not until after they had passed the cross-roads that they heard the rumble of wheels and saw the lights of an approaching carriage. The growl knew it at once. "It's the Honorable Wilmot's!" he said; and, on its drawing near, he called to the coachman to stop.

Then Clarke approached the carriage, and, apologising to the somewhat startled ladies within, explained what they were doing, and the painful nature of their search at this early hour of the morning. Mr. Wilmot was able to assure the servant that his master had most certainly left the Castle, as he had been talking with him in the outer hall just when he was on the point of leaving, and had seen him step into the covered waggonette. As he could not render any assistance, his carriage drove on, and took the turn at the cross-roads that led to their destination; while the Foxcote servants went on to the Castle lodge. There they ascertained from the lodge-keeper that Mr. Collingwood was inside the waggonette when it had gone through the lodge about two in the morning, and had leaned out of the window at the back to give him a piece of silver. But though this point was cleared up, Clarke thought it best to go on to the Castle, not only for the chance of his master having got there by some other road through the park, but also to make his disappearance known to the Duke's servants. This was done; and when they had fully ascertained that nothing had been seen of Mr. Collingwood since he had left the Castle, all they had to do was to return to Foxcote.

By this time the last carriages were driving away from Mowbray Castle; the Duchess of Melton's Christmas ball was over, though the great building was still ablaze with light, and the various lamps and fires in the park avenues were making lines of light in every direction. They returned to Foxcote in the same way that they had left it, searching narrowly as they went, and shouting Mr. Collingwood's name. By this time a few labourers were beginning to appear on the road, and to them they told the nature of their quest, and bade them search for any traces of their master wherever they might be going. Two watchers of the Duke were also encountered, returning home from their night's work; but they could not throw any light on the mystery, though they had imagined, early in the night, that they heard poachers in the Duke's Plantation; but they had not met with the men, nor had they heard any guns. As there had been so much that night to attract people's attention to the park and the vicinity of the Castle, the watchers had paid extra attention to the more distant woods, especially to the Big Wood and the Duke's Plantation, where the chief shooting was to be on the following day, thinking it probable that it would be a likely night for the poachers to be at work there. But, though they had fancied hearing some suspicious sounds, yet they had not met with any men. They remembered hearing the rattle of Mr. Collingwood's carriage, and also seeing its lamps, when they were near to a favourite pheasant-covert about a mile from the Duke's Plantation; but they were quite sure that it had never stopped for a minute, but had proceeded steadily on its way to Foxcote.

When Clarke and the other servants had returned with the waggonette, it was at once driven round to the stables; and the two ladies in the house knew that they brought no tidings. Nor had anything been heard, in the meantime, from any other source, to relieve their painfully excited feelings or to clear up the mystery. As the morning advanced, and the light of the December day grew stronger, a more extended search was made by a larger party, assisted by the rural police. The villagers and neighbours rendered willing aid; Mr. Wilmot and other friends came over to Foxcote in the course of the day, and took counsel with Mrs. Bulkeley as to the best way of clearing up the mystery; but the hours of that Friday in the Christmas week passed wearily away, and no tidings were brought to the anxious wife. Evening came, with its gloom and darkness, and she knew not what to think, but was full of forebodings of some terrible calamity.

CHAPTER IV.

INSIDE THE OLD MILL.

Very near the Duke's Plantation, but on the opposite side of that steep hill up which the waggonette had to toil on Mr. Collingwood's return from the Duchess's ball, was a ruined tower, which was a very picturesque object in the landscape. It was a stone structure, and had been built for the purposes of a windmill; on which account, it was placed on the highest point of the field that sloped down by the side of the Duke's Plantation to a trout-stream that flowed into the small lake, on the other side of which was the Big Wood where the Duke's shooting-party expected to find good sport on the Saturday after the ball. The sails and the whole of the upper portion of the windmill having, some years before, succumbed to a gale of wind, had not been replaced; and the truncated portion looked like a round tower that had been erected more for ornament than for use. In fact, it was put to very little use. Some sacks and an old cart were left there by the farmer who rented that field from the Duke; and heifers and young beasts were occasionally sheltered there. Beyond that, it was never used, though it still went by the name of the Old Mill, in remembrance of its former purpose.

Amos Bourne, a day-labourer on the farm, was going home from his work in the dusk of the evening of that Friday when search was made for Mr. Collingwood, and he crossed the field in which the Old Mill stood, in order to make a short cut. It was a providential circumstance that he did so; for, as he passed very near to the Old Mill, he heard a voice calling "Help!" and the voice evidently came from the inside of the building.

"Mussy on us, whaat's thaat?" cried the frightened Amos.

Then the voice came again, "Help! help! I'm inside this place!"

Amos hesitated a moment. Perhaps it might be a poacher, armed with a gun, and he might be shot. He was cautious and went to the door of the mill, and said, "Who'n be you?"

The answer came at once. "I'm Mr. Collingwood, of

Foxcote. Come and let me out. I'm tied with ropes, and can't move."

Thus reassured, Amos pushed open the door, and there, sure enough, was the young Squire, of whom, as he knew, search had been made all through that day. "Why, master," said Amos; "they bin a-looking for ye all day and night."

"If you've got a knife, cut these cords," said the Squire. He was lying on some old sacks on the ground, between the cart-shafts, to which he was securely tied hand and foot by cords. His overcoat was still on; but the fur rug that had been with him in the carriage was nowhere to be seen.

Amos produced his knife and quickly cut the cords. There was not much light left to guide him in this operation, as the base of the Old Mill was only lighted by one small window at some distance above the door, producing a Rembrandt-like effect. "Why, master, how did ye come here?" asked Amos, as he set Mr. Collingwood free.

"That's more than I can tell," replied the Squire, rising, somewhat stiffly, on his legs. "I conclude that I must have been carried here; but how, or by whom, I have no idea. I dropped asleep in the carriage and only awoke about half an hour since. What time is it?"

"Half after five."

"In the morning?"

"Lor bless you, no! in the evening."

"Then I must have been lying here the whole of the day. I must have been drugged!"

"Clorfermed, maybe?" suggested Amos.

"Very likely," said the Squire. "In fact, I think that I can smell its sickly flavour. Hallo! my watch and chain are gone! and my purse! and my rings! and my diamond studs! the rascals have made a clean sweep of everything. I wonder that they left me my crush hat. I must get home now as quickly as possible."

"Can you walk, master?"

"Oh yes! though I feel stiff, and cold too. But the walking will warm me up a bit."

"But," urged Amos, "it's a matter o' your miles to Foxcote."

"I feel rather stiffer than I had imagined," said Mr. Collingwood. "Will you go before me to Foxcote, as fast as ever you can, and I will follow along the road. Let Mrs. Collingwood be told at once that I am safe and well, and tell them to get the waggonette and come and meet me. I'll give you something another time for releasing me, and, perhaps, for saving my life."

Away sped Amos Bourne in the direction of Foxcote, though before he had got far on the road he met with one of the horsemen who were still on the search, and sent him off, full gallop, to the Hall, with the joyful tidings that the missing Squire had been found alive and well. Mr. Collingwood did not get very far on the road that led towards his home, for he was stiffer than he had even imagined himself to be, and he also felt sick and queer, possibly from the long fast no less than from the chloroform or other drug that had been used to steal away his consciousness. He was, therefore, not very sorry when the waggonette drove up, with Peters and Clarke on the box, supplied with wine, jelly, and biscuits sent by Mrs. Bulkeley; and, once more, he found himself in his carriage travelling back to Foxcote from the Duchess's Christmas ball.

The intense relief felt by his wife may be easily imagined, and need not be described. There was very little to be explained to her, as her husband knew nothing of what had happened from the moment of his falling asleep in the waggonette to the time of his awaking in the Old Mill. He had not the slightest idea of where he was laid. The cords—which it afterwards appeared belonged to the farmer, and had been some time there—did not particularly hurt him, though they completely prevented him from rising from his recumbent position. Marks of hob-nailed boots were found on the following day in the softer earth near the Mill, leading in the direction of the Duke's Plantation. These marks were not made by the boots of Amos Bourne, and it seemed from them that at least two men had been engaged in the work of abduction. Casts were taken of these footprints; a handsome reward was offered for the discovery of the thieves; pawn-brokers and other persons were communicated with as to the missing watch, purse, rings, and diamond studs; and not only the local police were busily engaged in the search, but a special detective was had down from London to assist them. Yet weeks and months passed away, and not the slightest trace could be discovered of anything that could clear up the mystery; and the nine-days' wonder that had gone the round of the papers began to be forgotten by all but those in the immediate neighbourhood of Foxcote.

Cuthbert Collingwood fulfilled his promise to join the Duke on the Saturday after the Duchess's ball, knowing that his putting in an appearance at the shooting party would set at rest any false rumours that might be circulated about him. And he not only received the congratulations of the Duke and his guests on his safety, and on his not being very much the worse for his adventure—minus the loss of his valuables—but he also shot some pheasants in the Big Wood, and a couple of woodcocks near the small lake that was just under the Duke's Plantation.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. COLLINGWOOD CALLS ON OLD MOTHER SWANN.

Nearly three years had passed away since the events of that night. The Duchess's Christmas ball had been twice given, and Mr. and Mrs. Collingwood had been present on each occasion; for, although a son had been born to them, his arrival had opportunely occurred in the second summer after Mr. Collingwood's adventure. On each occasion they had travelled safely to and from the Castle, driving in the brougham, and with a second man on the box. The invitation to another Christmas ball had come from the Duchess, and had been accepted by Mr. and Mrs. Collingwood, when an event occurred that must be here recorded as the conclusion of this story.

Not far from Foxcote Hall was a large heath, a portion of Mr. Collingwood's property. Fine groups of firs made this heath a very picturesque spot; and there was no house upon it, except an old thatched cottage on the side of the heath that was nearest to the Hall. This cottage was the home of a celebrity who usually went by the name of Old Mother Swann. She was a withered and bent old woman, who might be seen hobbling along with the help of a crooked stick, and curiously searching the hedgerows, whence she plucked certain leaves and plants which she carefully placed in a bag that hung from her waist.

With many in that neighbourhood she passed for a witch, though she did nothing more to sustain the character than being old and ugly, living quite alone, keeping two black cats, and manufacturing herb medicines of more or less nastiness of taste. The selling of these at a small rate, accompanied by much muttering of pretended charms, had given her the reputation of a witch; nor did she object to being so considered, as it gave her notoriety and power—two things that are very charming to many people who are even in a superior station of life to that enjoyed by old Mother Swann. So long as she could keep herself out of the dreaded

"Basteel"—as the workhouse was called in that neighbourhood—and gether living after her own fashion, she was content to bear with any jokes or insults that she might receive from those lads of the village, who, besides singing "merrily, ha!" not unfrequently degenerated to coarse ways and words, and delighted to make a butt of the old witch. But the poor woman was very harmless, and only used her reputed powers in self-defence, even as her two cats used their claws.

The worst that was ever said of her was that she sometimes harboured poachers, who found her cottage convenient for rendezvous or retreat. One circumstance that may have given rise to this report was that her only son was a noted poacher. He went by the sobriquet of Oyster Bob, from having, at one period of his chequered career, been an assistant to a fish-hawker who vended cheap oysters in the streets. But this business was too staid and respectable for his tastes; so Oyster Bob turned poacher, and thrived very well in his new profession, until he was committed to prison for three years for assaulting Mr. Collingwood's gamekeeper, who had found him at midnight in the Duke's Plantation with pheasants in his pockets. That was six years ago; and, as Oyster Bob had not been seen in the neighbourhood of Foxcote since the date of his release from imprisonment, it was surmised that he had gone elsewhere, and it was hoped that he was living more reputably. No information concerning him could be extracted from his mother.

It may have been true that the poachers rewarded her for occasionally harbouring them by paying her, in their own peculiar coin, with some of the game procured by their night's work; and it is also possible that they may have partaken of sundry meals cooked in her iron witch-like pot. And, indeed, one day, when Mrs. Collingwood—who was very kind to the old woman, and often went to see her and to read to her—had somewhat unexpectedly entered the cottage, there was a something simmering in the pot, which, both to Mrs. Collingwood's eyes and nose, bore an amazing resemblance to jugged hare; but to which neither that lady nor old Mother Swann had the politeness to refer. When some of the rustics had visited her to procure herb medicines and charms, and had also seen that magic pot filled with good things that gave forth an appetising smell, old Mother Swann always averred that it was hell-broth.

Some people said that her two black cats, Scratch and Match, were poachers, and were trained to bring to their mistress the partridges and rabbits that they killed. But if such was the case they must have borne a charmed life; for Mr. Collingwood's keeper, who vowed vengeance against all cats, would have rejoiced to shoot them, and to have added their tails to that post of trophies entirely composed of the tails of slaughtered cats, which formed the chief ornament in the little plot of garden in the front of his cottage. A distinguished, but short-sighted, botanist, who was visiting at the Hall, had seen this trophy of cats' tails, and had imagined it to be a rare specimen of the araucaria. But Mother Swann's two cats were either too cunning for the keeper, or else the report of their poaching propensities was a scandal and an invention.

It was a fortnight before Christmas, and Mrs. Collingwood had gone to old Mother Swann's cottage to take her tea, sugar, and various eatables, and to remind her that her Christmas dinner would be sent to her, as usual, on Christmas Eve. When she went there, she made a rule that no dog should accompany her; and, when she read to old Mother Swann, the two black cats, Scratch and Match, sat on either side their mistress, and behaved themselves as well and decently as the shepherds' dogs do in a West Highland kirk during Divine service. But, on the present occasion, Mrs. Collingwood had been slyly followed by her Skye terrier, Mac, and his appearance in the cottage caused as great alarm to Mrs. Collingwood lest he should be injured by the cats, as it did to the cats for fear that he should worry them. But old Mother Swann was equal to the emergency, and calling Scratch and Match to her, unceremoniously bundled them into the oven, and shut the door upon them. Although the oven was cold, the cats did not much like their treatment and close quarters, for every now and then Mrs. Collingwood's reading was disturbed by growling, spitting, and swearing, which, although toned down by the closed oven door, were not the less inappropriate to the occasion; especially as at each rise of the feline tempest old Mother Swann lulled it by rattling the oven-door and exclaiming, "Behave yourselves, do, you bad cats!"

Meanwhile, Mac was sniffing and scratching at the door that led into the inner room of the cottage. There was evidently something inside that attracted his attention.

CHAPTER VI.

OYSTER BOB CLEARS UP THE MYSTERY.

"Surely, Mrs. Swann," said Mrs. Collingwood, as she came to the end of her reading, "I have heard someone groaning in that room at the door of which my little dog is scratching. You have someone ill in that room. Who is it?"

Probably, old Mother Swann saw that it was useless to deny the fact, for she said, "It's a secret, my Lady; but, I hope you won't tell of me. It's my poor lad, who's been such a trouble to me."

"Do you mean the son of whom you once told me?"

"Yes, my lady; Bob. I never had no other. The same as is called Oyster Bob, and was sent to prison for three years this Christmas six years for poaching on the Squire's woods and hurting his keeper. When he was let out, he got into fresh trouble, and he went off far away from here, and never came nigh his poor old mother till the day before yesterday. He's took very bad with the new complaint—the kitis."

"Bronchitis: it is a serious complaint."

"The ribs that he got broke, in the tussle with the Squire's keeper, never got properly mended, and have plagued him sadly. He's altogether wore to a atommy, and never expects to rise from his bed again." The old woman added, "You bad cats!" as she rattled the oven door.

"He must not be lost for want of being seen to," said Mrs. Collingwood. "We must look after him at once. I will send Dr. Freeth to him; perhaps he will be able to do him some good."

"No doctor's stuff 'll cure him, my lady. I've given him some of my herbs, and even they are quite thrown away upon him."

But, although old Mother Swann had a good opinion of her own drugs, Mrs. Collingwood determined to send the doctor, nevertheless; and she did so that same afternoon; and also sent to the cottage jelly and other nourishing things. But she was told by the Doctor that the man's life could be scarcely prolonged through the month, for that he was in the last stage of consumption. The Rector also went to see the man the month, for that he was in

the last stage of consumption. The Rector also went to see the man terribly emaciated, gasping for breath, and only able to talk in short and broken sentences. There were many interruptions to the narrative, but its substance was as follows:—"I was the man known as Oyster Bob, as got the three years for poaching on your property, and breaking

your keeper's head with a hedge-stake; and I got nothing else for it, except the broken ribs that he gave me with the butt-end of his gun, and which are helping me to my grave. I did my time, and came out of gaol this very day three years, two days before Christmas Day. Another man came out with me; but, of course, no one would give us any work. We tramped across the country; for I wanted to see my old mother, and the old home, such as it is. I hadn't found poaching a profitable trade, but I'd nothing else to turn to; no more had my mate; so we did a stroke of work on the Duke's property, keeping clear of the keepers, and making no noise. No, Sir, we didn't use snares and traps—at least, the sort as you mean; and we'd no guns to carry; we managed our business in a quieter way. You've been a good friend to me, Sir, better nor I have been to you; and your good lady's been very good to me and poor old mother; so, to make you what amends I can, I'll tell you my secret. You must get a dozen or so of small rods, that'll fit into each other, like the parts of a fishing-rod, and will all go into a side pocket without making any bundle. And, on the topmost bit, there must be a twisted loop of wire. So, when you've got into the wood, and under the trees where the pheasants are roosting up in the boughs, all you've got to do is to put together your fishing-rod for the length that you require, and pass it quietly up to the pheasant that you have fixed upon. You can make out their figures very well in a dusk light, better even than when it's moonlight. And then you must rapidly bring the wire loop over the pheasant's head, and give it a dexterous twist and jerk—you'll soon learn how to do it; and down will come your pheasant, as quiet as can be, too much choked to give the slightest crow; and a knock of his head against a tree will finish his business; and then you put him in your pocket. I've noosed many a pheasant in that way, without any noise or disturbance. And here's the 'dental' bundle of rods; and I'll make you a present of 'em, Sir, in return for your kindness to me."

Oyster Bob reached his hand to a place under the head of his bed, and brought out from thence the poacher's destructive weapon, which Mr. Collingwood pocketed and took home, and carefully preserved, though he never took out a patent for the invention.

"But, Sir," he continued, "I can't die easy till I've asked your forgiveness for what I done to you. Me and my mate were in the Duke's Plantation, up to our knees with the pheasants, on that very night in the Christmas week when the Duke gave his annual treat to the swells. We were very narrowly took by the keepers, but lay quiet, and they went off to another wood just as your carriage came along the road. We were lying behind a stone-heap when you passed us very slowly at the foot of that steep hill, and my mate whispered, 'The coachman's dropped fast asleep, and there's only one gent inside. There's a back door and winder, and the steps let down all handy. I'll jump in quietly and give him some of the hocus-pocus on a hankercher. If he sings out we must jump the wall into the Duke's Plantation and make off!'"

"Well, Sir, he'd got some sleepy stuff in a bottle, and he poured some of this on to a hankercher, and we stole up quietly behind the carriage, though the wheels rattled and made such a clatter that there was not much chance of your hearing us. My mate pushed aside a red curtain that was over the door and peeped in. 'S'elp me!' he whispered to me, 'the gent's as fast asleep as the coachman. But it'll be better to make him secure with the hankercher.' Well, Sir, I peeped in, and I then saw as it was you; and I said to my mate, 'It's Squire Collingwood of Foxcote, the very gent as got me my three years in quod.' 'Then,' says my mate, 'we'll give him tit for tat, and put him in quod, and he'll know then what it's like!'"

"Well, Sir, I didn't altogether understand what he meant, and it was not a time to ask unnecessary questions; and my mate had opened the carriage door, and sprung lightly up the steps, and gave me out a fur rug from the inside. And then he appeared at the door with you, Sir, in his arms, and the hocus-pocus hankercher across your mouth. I took you from him, the carriage going very slowly up the hill, and he jumped out, fastened the door, and drew the curtain. The coachman was asleep all the while, and the carriage went on as though nothing had happened. My mate says, 'Let's carry him to the Old Mill.' So we made a sort of hammock of the fur rug, and slung you in it, and carried you quite easily, going along the end riding in the Duke's Plantation, and through the hand-gate, and across the field to the Old Mill. We found some cords there and an old cart handy for the purpose; so my mate said, 'Now we'll give him a taste of quod, and see how he likes what he recommends to others.' Then we tied you securely to the shafts, and took your watch and all that we could find about you. 'He'll get a few hours' unnatural sleep,' said my mate, 'and then he'll wake up to find himself in quod; and he may think himself lucky that he's only got to hollah loud enough, and someone'll come and set him free without his serving his full time.' I think, Sir, as my mate must have hocus-poccussed you stronger than he had meant to do; at least, I never thought as you would be lying there all next day; but it was needful to make you safe for a time, so as to give us a few hours' start. Well, Sir, we left you shut up in the Old Mill, and we came on hero to mother's and had some breakfast, and at once left those parts and made the best of our way to Portsmouth, where we knew a Jew fence as would give us ready money for the things as he had taken from you. He said that the shiny things in the shirt-studs and ring wasn't diamonds, but only paste; so he didn't allow us very little for 'em. Me and my mate had divided the things, and I had got the watch and chain; but the Jew wouldn't give as much as I thought he ought to, so I kept back the wrist, and afterwards I got frightened about it, and when I next came to see mother I hid it in a hole in the thatch, intending to make use of it at some other time. But that time has never come, and the watch is still there, and you can have it back again, though there's no chain to it."

Oyster Bob directed the Squire where to look; and there was the watch in the hole under the thatch. So Mr. Collingwood held it once more in his hand. The last time that he had done so was, three years ago, at Mowbray Castle, when he had looked at it to see what time it was when he left the Duchess's Christmas ball.

"My mate," continued Oyster Bob, "soon after gotten years penal for a 'highway' with violence, so I saw no more of him; and, getting worse in my health and down on my luck, I thought I'd come back here and see my poor old mother once again before it was all over with me."

Such was his story, told with much difficulty, and taking much time in the telling. And it was barely told in time; for he burst a blood-vessel that same night, and when the doctor got to the cottage the next morning he found old Mother Swann lamenting the death of her only son.

He was buried on the day of the Duchess's Christmas ball, to which Mr. and Mrs. Collingwood once more went. And the Squire of Foxcote was able to tell his host and hostess that the mystery had now been cleared up that had attended his return from a previous Christmas ball, when, on his way home, he was constrained to pass many hours in the Old Mill near the Duke's Plantation.

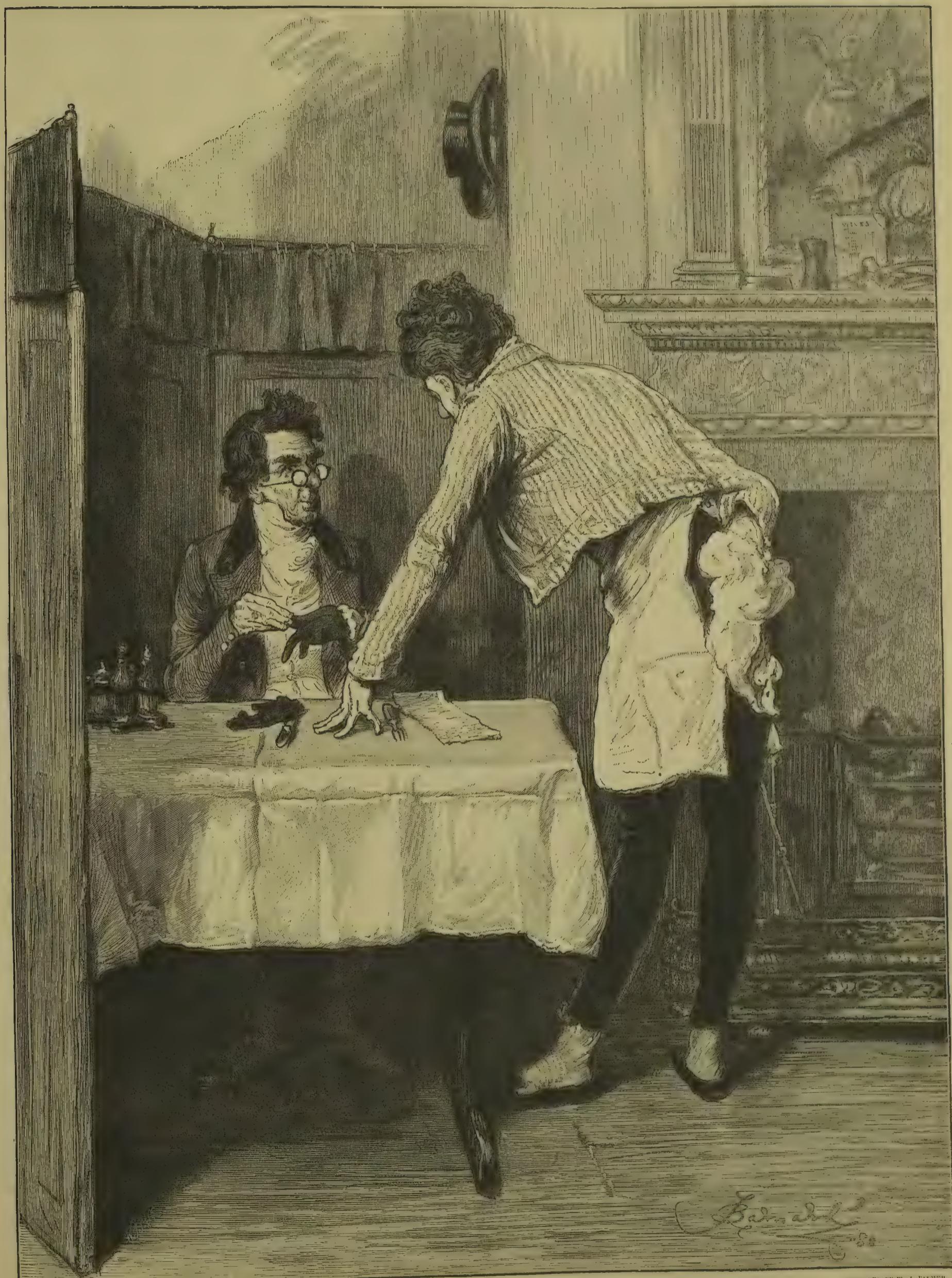


DRAWN BY R. C. WOODVILLE.

R. & E. TAYLOR.

ENGRAVED BY R. AND E. TAYLOR.

A GHOST STORY.



A LITTLE DINNER WITH JONES.

(See Illustration.)

When I came up to London two years ago to look for an opening as a medical man, my aunt, Miss Ap-Rees, of Rees Castle, was good enough to give me a letter of introduction to her cousin, Mr. Pwllhyll Jones, of Kensington, who, she assured me, was a most influential man, and might be of great service to me. Moreover, she added that he was very rich, and had an only daughter, who was both beautiful and amiable. Here, my aunt hinted, was a famous chance for a rising young man.

A friend had recommended me to comfortable rooms in the neighbourhood of the Strand, and I went straight to them on my arrival in town on a certain Monday in December. I have a very treacherous memory; and, seeing that my aunt's letter was already fully directed in her stiff, old-fashioned hand, I thought I would make sure of not forgetting by sending it off at once. So, taking one of my cards, on which these words were inscribed—

MR. JOHN REES, M.R.C.S.,
B.I.G.G.W.S.B.E.R.I.S.

I wrote under the name "will have the pleasure of calling on Mr. Pwllhyll Jones on Wednesday evening," and popped it into the envelope with my aunt's letter. Then I dropped the letter into a pillar-box, and thanked goodness it was off my mind. Next day I received a most polite note from Mr. Jones, begging me to forego ceremony and come to dine on Wednesday *en famille*. "As you intended calling on Wednesday in any case," he added, "don't trouble to reply. Dinner at seven sharp, but come as early as you like." I thought this very friendly of Jones, and, of course, determined to go.

On the Wednesday, I dressed myself with care (for first impressions are everything), and, starting at six o'clock, took the underground railway to South Kensington. When I arrived there it suddenly occurred to me that I did not remember my friend's address. I knew it was Kensington, but the street and number had entirely escaped me. Stop, though! I had his note in my pocket, and I drew it out and glanced at the top. By Jove! it had neither date nor address. Un-pardonable carelessness of Jones, I thought; but what was to be done? It was only a quarter past six, so I had lots of time, and my first idea was to apply to a policeman. I did so. But the man of law only knew one Mr. Jones living in Kensington, and he was a pawnbroker. Clearly this could not be my Mr. Jones, and the officer recommended me to inquire at a cab-stand. Thereupon a convocation of cabmen agreed that it must be Mr. Jones, of Redcliffe-square. Several offered to drive me there, and I jumped into a hansom. There was a brass plate on the gate of the house at which we stopped, with "Mr. P. Jones" in large letters. There was something else in smaller letters in the corner, but it was too dark to make out, so I dismissed my cab and knocked. The door was opened by a funeral-looking man-servant. "Is Mr. Jones at home?" I asked. "Yes, Sir," said the man, eyeing me as an undertaker might his "patient." Then he added, "The gentleman who was to be here at seven, I presume?" I nodded acquiescence cheerfully. "Master expects you, Sir," he almost groaned, and then, with an air of unmitigated woe, he threw open a side door, and ushered me into a small room which looked like a library. Here he handed me the supplement of the *Times* and left me alone. The chair I sat down in was very comfortable, I don't think I ever had such a comfortable seat, and I mentally resolved that I would get one some day precisely like it. It had a very sloping back worked by a crank to different angles, and the top of the back spread out into a concave cushion, which exactly supported the head. Presently Mr. Jones entered. He was a stout, florid man, who seemed to throw suddenly into his face an expression of genial sympathy as he opened the door. I was abashed to perceive that he was in morning dress, whereas I had got myself up, as they say, "regardless of expense." As I rose Mr. Jones extended his hand and squeezed mine impressively, still with that expression of respectful sympathy pervading his face. "How are we to-day?" he murmured, with his head on one side. This form of inquiry sounded professional at any rate, and I assured him that I was never better in my life, except for a slight twinge of toothache. "Ah! just so," he remarked, as if the information afforded him intense satisfaction. Then he motioned me to the chair, which he wheeled directly under the gas, and I sat down. Evidently rather an eccentric sort of fellow, I thought, as he put his left hand on the top of my head, holding the other behind him as he stood. "Have the goodness to open your mouth," he said. I smiled and did so. Perhaps he was a horsey man, and wanted to judge of my age and general fitness by my teeth. "A little wider, please." It was getting rather ridiculous; but I remembered my aunt's injunctions to be civil to her cousin, and I opened my mouth to its widest extent. After peering intently into it for some seconds, my host suddenly brought his right hand round from behind his back, and before I could say a word he had got some horrid instrument fixed on one of my favourite molars, and was wrenching away at it like a fiend. This was too much. I struggled. I screamed. At last I managed to shake him off, and there we stood glaring at each other and perspiring. Fortunately, I had saved my tooth. It felt loose, but it was still there. I was very indignant. Explanations followed. It seemed he was a dentist, and had an appointment with a patient, for whom he took me. We both apologised, and he begged my acceptance of one of his cards, on which I read,

MR. PENRHYS JONES,
SURGEON DENTIST.

As the funeral man-servant let me out his face relaxed into a sickly smile. I believe the wretch knew all about it; but I breathed freely once more as I found myself in the square.

"Well!" said I to myself, "that was a lucky escape, anyhow!" Just at this moment I caught sight of a postman crossing the top of the square. I rushed after him, and asked him if he knew a Mr. Pwllhyll Jones. "Jones," he reflected—yes, he knew another Jones—he wasn't sure about the Pwllhyll, but thought it was a P—something. This Jones lived at No. —, Queen's-gate. It looked likely, and I took a fresh cab at once. No. —, Queen's-gate was all lighted up. Evidently some festivities were going on, and I descended with a light heart. It was a fine house, too; and I gave a modest knock. The door was opened by a magnificent footman in livery. Mr. Jones was evidently a swell. John Thomas looked me over rather superciliously, I thought, before he consented to throw open the portals. Then he said, "You're late, ain't you?" Was I?—well, perhaps I had mistaken the hour. "Dinner begun?" I asked, ineckly. "Begin! no!" he replied with a snort. "Ow can it begin without you, hay?" This was flattering, but the man's familiarity revolted me. I threw off my overcoat and

hat, which John Thomas took from me with a jerk, and chucked unceremoniously into a corner. At this point a very charming young lady tripped lightly down stairs. She was in a becoming demi-toilette—what I fancy is called a tea-gown; but I don't know much about such things. "O! I am so glad you've come at last," she said. This was really very flattering, and I bowed awkwardly. I felt that I was blushing, which made me more awkward still. "There's all the table to arrange," she went on, with a pleasant smile. Really, a most charming creature. I wondered if she were the daughter. But what did she mean? I followed her into a handsomely-appointed dining-room, where there was a long table on which was a white cloth—and nothing more. On the sideboard was displayed a lavish profusion of plate, to which she directed my attention; and the effulgent footman, with another glorious being who had joined him, came into the room and stood at attention.

A sudden suspicion flashed across my mind. There must be some ridiculous mistake. "Is not this Mr. Pwllhyll Jones's?" I faltered out. Then the young lady exploded into a merry laugh. She explained that the house belonged to her father, Sir PAUL JONES, who was, I remembered, Chairman of Highway Boards. He was giving a dinner-party that evening, and—and—confound it all!—they had taken me for the young man from Gunters! I reclaimed my coat and gibus amid profuse apologies from the blushing young lady; and, brushing past those sniggering beasts of flunkies, I gained the door and fled into the "ewigkeit."

When I had somewhat recovered my equanimity, I looked at my watch and found it still wanted a quarter to seven. All was not lost, then. Nevertheless, it was excessively awkward. Hurrying up Queen's-gate, I found myself in Kensington High-street, and at the corner of a street I perceived a house-agent's office. There seemed to be a chance here, and I entered and made inquiries. "Pwllhyll Jones," murmured the agent reflectively. "You are sure it is Pwllhyll?" he asked. Yes, I replied, I was quite sure of that, anyhow. Then he referred to a book and said, "There's a P. Jones lives at No. —, Holland-road, perhaps that's your man." I said I would try him at any rate; and, with acknowledgments to the agent for his courtesy, I called another cab and set off once more.

No. —, Holland-road proved to be at the upper extremity of that longest and straightest of streets. The house looked respectable, and I rang the bell. Hardly had my hand touched it when the door was opened cautiously, and the head of a weazened old woman thrust itself out. "You are the Doctor, I suppose," she said, in a hoarse whisper. I replied that my name was Mr.—, or, if she liked, "Doctor"—Rees, whereupon she beckoned me in without saying another word, and closed the door. The hall was rather dark, but in the dim light I could make out that the old woman was very pale, and trembling all over. "You had better go up to him," she said; and I became aware of a tremendous noise above us. Then a japanned tea-tray came bounding and rattling down the stairs, whereupon the old woman, with a little shriek, scuttled off hurriedly, and disappeared somewhere at the back, where I heard her lock herself in; and I was left alone in the hall. I didn't like it all, and had half a mind to let myself quietly out again. But then I thought I might as well see this thing through. So I boldly mounted the stairs. On the landing there were several doors. One was partly open, and a faint light streamed from it. From the inside I could hear a man's voice uttering the most awful imprecations. I feared I might be intruding upon a family quarrel, and therefore coughed loudly to call attention to my presence. There was a sudden cessation of the noise, and presently a man's voice called out querulously, "Come in, whoever you are!" This was not encouraging; but I entered, and to my dismay found I was in a bed-room. A middle-aged man, with a very red face, lay on the bed half-dressed, and shaking violently all over. The furniture of the room looked as if somebody had been dancing upon it, and the pillows were lying about the floor. The man glared at me savagely for a moment, and then, shouting, "O! here are some more of you!" he hurled the bolster with all his force at my head. I dodged it; but I began to perceive that I had made another mistake. "Who the d— are you?" yelled the man. I endeavoured to explain, but before I had got half a dozen words out, my friend, who I saw was suffering under an attack of delirium tremens, was out of bed, and, making a sudden spring, pinned me by the throat before I could stir a finger to prevent him. I was nearly choked, but struggled desperately; and at last, by a great effort, succeeded in freeing myself. Seeing an open door, I dashed through it and found myself in a small dressing-room with no other egress than the window. Hastily throwing it open, I sprang on to the sill and grasped the iron pipe which ran by its side. It was a good drop down into the back yard upon which the window gave; but by the help of the pipe I descended into the darkness beneath, and came down with a splash into the middle of a huge water-butt. Happily, it had not much in it; but I could feel the cold fluid trickling into my thin shoes. Then began a most terrible cannonade. Hair-brushes, boot-jacks, pin-cushions—all manner of toilet articles—came flying from the window about my ears, but I kept my head well down and did not get very much hit. Presently there was a lull, and I ventured to look out. There was a wall close by, the top of which I could just reach by standing on the edge of the water-butt. I scrambled up without much difficulty, and dropped down gently on the other side—into the arms of a policeman!

"Now, there's no use your kicking," this worthy remarked, as he pinned me roughly by the collar and cuff; "if you don't come along quietly, I'll whip the darbies on to yer in a jiffey." In vain I expostulated, and, all breathless as I was, tried to tell him all about it. He only warned me that whatever I said would be "used agin' me," and, taking a firm grip, he marched me off, despite my struggles. At the corner of the street he gave a whistle, and, another constable coming up, I was "run in" between them to the station amid signs of great popular excitement on the part of the loafers and small boys who crowded round and after us.

At the station I was introduced to the Inspector, and I have no doubt that my appearance, without a hat, and draggled and smirched as I was, convinced that worthy officer that I was a criminal of the deepest dye. I attempted to give a connected narrative of myself, but I don't think the Police paid much attention to it. The constable who had effected my capture swore that he had had his eye (he called it "hey'e") on me for a long time, and knew me to be a notorious cracksmen. The other, with more modesty, declared that my breath "smelt strong of sperrits," and accused me of being drunk and disorderly. Between them, they gave me a pretty character; but I think I was more indignant about the accusation of drunkenness than the more serious one. I could, of course, prove that I wasn't a burglar; but it is another thing to convince an opinionated policeman that a man is not drunk. I therefore insisted on the divisional surgeon being sent for to say whether I was sober or not; and, rather to my surprise, the Inspector consented. In the meantime I was thrust into a bare and cheerless room, with nothing in it save two hard benches, to await the arrival of the medical officer. In a quarter of an hour or so that gentleman made his appearance; a plump little rosy-faced man with a very bald head. To him I recounted my

history, and, as it proceeded, his face, which at first had been somewhat grave, expanded into a broad smile, and at last he sat down on one of the benches, and, slapping his thighs, fairly burst into roars of laughter. I felt rather hurt, for I confess it was no joke to me to have lost my dinner, and got landed in such a predicament; and I think I told him so. At this he exploded in fresh roars, and at length managed to gasp out, "D—d—don't you see the joke—ho! ho! oh! dear! ha! ha! Why, man alive, I am Mr. Pwllhyll Jones; and we had been waiting dinner for you a quarter of an hour when I was sent for to examine an alleged drunkard—ho! ho!"

Of course, after this I was immediately set at liberty, and accompanied my new-found friend to his comfortable house on Campden-hill, where, after repairing, with my host's assistance, as far as was possible, the damages my wardrobe had sustained, I was taken by him into the drawing-room and presented to his daughter, whom I found "all my (Aunt's) fancy painted her," and more. My host being a little man and fat, while I am long and slim, my appearance in some of his garments must, I feel, have been rather absurd; but when once Miss Jones understood the situation, her sweet sympathy with the sufferings I had undergone more than compensated me for the banterings of her Papa, who, however, turned out to be a very good fellow indeed, and some time afterwards (as my Aunt predicted) was of much service to me. Indeed, it was he who helped me to buy the very comfortable practice which I now enjoy in my native town of Biggsberis. I need not say I thoroughly enjoyed my dinner at last, and it was really not much spoilt, after all, by the unavoidable delay. In fact, I shall always look back with peculiar pleasure to the first little dinner I had "chez Jones."

P.S.—Mrs. Rees, who has just read this, says that if I had seen her after I left that evening, screaming, while her Papa roared, at my adventures and appearance, I should not lay so much stress on her "sweet sympathy." But no matter.

J. P. A.

LATE FOR DINNER.

(See Illustration.)

Poem and prose is the life of man,
There's a little of each in our measured span
Whether we're saint or sinner.
So thinks the lady, who sits behind
As his Worship rides through the biting wind,
And gives her a bit of his lordly mind
Because they are late for dinner.

The poem was all in the long ago,
When he rode through many a mile of snow—
In the days when he sought to win her.
'Twas a kiss at the end of his journey then;
Now he's cross as the crossest of married men
Because—oh, theme for a poet's pen!—
Because they are late for dinner.

Ah, me! how poetry fades to prose
As the eyes show signs of "the feet of crows,"
And the hair of the head grows thinner.
For one of his lady's glances soft
He has risked his neck, has his Worship, oft,
And now she thinks, as she's bumped aloft,
He's risking her's for his dinner.

GEORGE R. SIMS.

WANDERING THOUGHTS.

(See Illustration.)

On Sunday eve, the parents with their daughter
To keep a sweet and sacred custom come;
Together drink "the fount of living water,"
And read the Bible in their quiet home.
Strong is the father's voice; and now 'tis laden
With sentences of Truth; yet strays, we fear,
As from the page her eye, in this fair maiden,
The wayward mind from words that strike her ear.
What reveries come o'er the fancy stealing?
Where lurk those wandering thoughts, that idly rove?
Ah! we too have been young, and know the feeling
That draws a heart to seek its absent love! A.

THE FAVOURITE.

(See Illustration.)

I said, my thought, the charm impart,
The very spell that chains the heart,
That makes a form all eyes delight,
A face, a rapture to our sight.
Is it the gleam of rippled hair,
Of brows that make the day more fair,
The tint of cheeks or lips that show
The very curves of Cupid's bow,
Or shell-like ears or rounded chin
Whose dimples dear Love laughs within?
Ah, he to whom these sights are shown,
He beauty's awful might has known
And made kind Memory surely store
These for his worship evermore.
Yet, more than charms that ever were,
In tint or curve, our hearts to stir,
Is that dear power, all powers above,
That rules us with the might of love.
See, here, the semblance fair of one
Who, with her, ever brings the sun,
Who, since her lustre first we saw,
Has waked in all more love than awe;
Though in her girlhood's grace was seen
The regal future of a Queen,
Who knew in her that happy hour
The sceptred sway of coming power,
Or felt their hearts more quickly beat
For aught but that she bloomed so sweet?
No need had that young sunlit hair
Of regal round to gild it fair;
Those tender eyes, what need had they
Of throned pride, our hearts to sway?
With love was her sweet nature blest,
That ruled us more than all the rest;
Before her fairness hearts might fall,
Love, more than loveliness, won all;
Love in her lived, and through her proved
Its charm and power where'er she moved.
Is aught beneath or aught above
The tenderness of that dear love?
See, even the very kitten here,
Her pet, is to our Favourite dear;
And has the reign of her sweet past
Not proved a rule o'er us to last?
Has she not all her sway made good
And broadened it through womanhood?
Till all, our Favourite fittest own
To make within our hearts her throne!

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A TALE OF FOUR MOONLIGHT NIGHTS.

BY THOMAS HARDY,

AUTHOR OF "FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD," "THE TRUMPET-MAJOR," ETC.

FIRST NIGHT.

The Christmas moon shone coldly upon the upland, and the upland reflected its irradiation in frost-sparkles so minute as only to be discernible by an eye near at hand. This eye was the eye of a shepherd lad, exceptionally young for his occupation, who stood within a wheeled hut of the kind commonly in use among sheep-keepers during the early lambing season, and was abstractedly looking through the loophole at the scene without.

The spot was called Lambing Corner, and it was a sheltered portion of that wide expanse of rough pasture-land known as Verncombe Down, which you cross in its lower levels when following the turnpike-road from Casterbridge eastward, before you come to Melchester. Here, where the hut stood, the land was high and dry, open except to the north, and commanding an undulating view for miles. On the north side grew a tall belt of coarse furze, with enormous stalks, a clump of the same standing detached in front of the bernal mass. The clump was hollow, and the interior had been ingeniously taken advantage of as a position for the before-mentioned hut, which was thus completely screened from winds, and almost invisible, except through the narrow approach. But the furze twigs had been cut away from the two little windows of the hut, that the occupier might keep his eye on the scene.

In the rear, the shelter afforded by the belt of furze-bushes was artificially improved by an inclosure of upright stakes, interwoven with boughs of the same prickly vegetation, and within the inclosure lay the renowned Verncombe breeding flock of eight hundred ewes.

To the south, in the direction of the young shepherd's idle gaze, there rose one conspicuous object above the uniform moon-lit plateau, and only one. It was a Druidical trilithon, consisting of three oblong stones in the form of a doorway, two on end and one across as a lintel. Each stone had been worn, scratched, washed, nibbled, split, and otherwise attacked by ten thousand different weathers; but now the blocks looked shapely and little the worse for wear, so beautifully were they silvered over by the light of the moon. The ruin was locally called the Devil's Door.

An old shepherd presently entered the hut from the direction of the ewes, and looked around in the gloom. "Be ye sleepy?" he asked in cross accents of the boy.

The lad replied rather timidly in the negative.

"Then," said the shepherd, "I'll get me home-along, and rest for a few hours. There's nothing to be done here now that I can see. The ewes can want no more tending till day-break—'tis beyond the bounds of reason that they can. But as the order is that one of us must bide, I'll leave you, d'ye hear. You can sleep by day, and I can't. And you can be down to my house in ten minutes if anything should happen. I can't afford ye candle; but, as 'tis Christmas week, and the time that folks have hollerdays, you can enjoy yerself by falling asleep a bit in the chair instead of bidding awake all the time. But mind, not longer at once than while the shade of the Devil's Door moves a couple of spans, for ye must keep an eye upon the ewes."

The boy made no definite reply, and the old man, stirring the fire in the stove with his crook-stem, closed the door upon his companion and vanished.

As this had been more or less the course of events every night since the season's lambing had set in, the boy was not at all surprised at the charge, and amused himself for some time by lighting straws at the stove. He then went out to the ewes and new-born lambs, re-entered, sat down, and finally fell asleep. This was his customary manner of performing his watch, for though special permission for naps had this week been accorded, he had, as a matter of fact, done the same thing on every preceding night, sleeping often till awakened by a smack on the shoulder at three or four in the morning from the sheep-crook of the old man.

It might have been about eleven o'clock when he awoke. He was so surprised at awaking without, apparently, being called or struck, that on second thoughts he assumed that somebody must have called him in spite of appearances, and looked out of the hut window towards the sheep. They all lay as quiet as when he had visited them, very little bleating being audible, and no human soul disturbing the scene. He next looked from the opposite window, and here the case was different. The frost-facets glistened under the moon as before; an occasional furze-bush showed as a dark spot on the same; and in the foreground stood the ghostly form of the trilithon. But in front of the trilithon stood a man.

That he was not the shepherd, or any one of the farm-labourers, was apparent in a moment's observation, his dress being a dark suit, and his figure of slender build and graceful carriage. He walked backwards and forwards in front of the trilithon.

The shepherd lad had hardly done speculating on the strangeness of the unknown's presence here at such an hour, when he saw a second figure crossing the open sward towards the locality of the trilithon and furze clump that screened the hut. This second personage was a woman; and immediately on sight of her the male stranger hastened forward, meeting her just in front of the hut window. Before she seemed to be aware of his intention, he clasped her in his arms.

The lady released herself, and drew back with some dignity.

"You have come, Harriet—bless you for it!" he exclaimed, fervently.

"But not for this," she answered, in offended accents. And then, more good-naturedly, "I have come, Fred, because you intreated me so!" What can have been the object of your writing such a letter? I feared I might be doing you grievous ill by staying away. How did you come here?"

"I walked all the way from my father's."

"Well, what is it? How have you lived since we last met?"

"But roughly: you might have known that without asking. I have seen many lands and many faces since I last walked these downs; but I have only thought of you."

"Is it only to tell me this that you have summoned me so strangely?"

A passing breeze blew away the murmur of the reply and several succeeding sentences, till the man's voice again became audible in the words, "Harriet—truth between us two! I have heard that the Duke does not treat you too well."

"He is warm-tempered; but he is a good husband."

"He speaks roughly to you, and sometimes even threatens to lock you out of doors."

"Only once, Fred! On my honour, only once. The Duke is a fairly good husband, I repeat. But you deserve punishment for this night's trick of drawing me out. What does it mean?"

"Harriet, is this fair or honest? Is it not notorious that

your life with him is a sad one—that, in spite of the sweetness of your temper, the sourness of his embitters your days? I have come to know if I can help you. You are a Duchess, and I am Fred Pentridge; but it is not impossible that I may be able to help you. . . . Heavens! the sweetness of that tongue ought to keep him civil, especially when there is added to it the sweetness of that face!"

"Captain Pentridge!" she exclaimed, with an emphasis of playful fear. "How can such a friend of my youth behave to me as you do! Don't speak so, and stare at me so! Is this really all you have to say? I see I ought not to have come. 'Twas thoughtlessly done!"

Another breeze broke the thread of discourse for a time.

"Very well. I perceive you are dead and lost to me," he could next be heard to say. "'Captain Penridge' proves that. As I once loved you I love you now, Harriet, without one jot of abatement; but you are not the woman you were—you once were honest towards me; and now you conceal your heart in fictitious speech. Let it be: I can never see you again."

"You need not say that in such a tragedy tone. You may see me in an ordinary way—why should you not? But, of course, not in such a way as this. I should not have come now, if it had not happened that the Duke is away from home, so that there is nobody to check my erratic impulses."

"When does he return?"

"The day after to-morrow, or the day after that."

"Then meet me again to-morrow night."

"No, Fred—I cannot."

"If you cannot to-morrow night, you can the night after; one of the two before he comes please bestow on me. Now, your hand upon it! To-morrow or next night you will see me to bid me farewell!" He seized the Duchess's hand.

"No, but Fred—let go my hand! What do you mean by holding me so! If it be love to forget all respect to a woman's present position in thinking of her past, then yours may be so, Frederick. It is not kind and gentle of you to induce me to come to this place for pity of you, and then to hold me here."

"But see me once more! I have come two thousand miles to ask it."

"Oh, I must not! There will be slanders—Heaven knows what! I cannot meet you. For the sake of old times don't ask it."

"Then own two things to me: that you did love me once, and that your husband is unkind to you often enough now to make you think of the time when you cared for me."

"Yes—I own them both," she answered faintly. "But owning such as that tells against me; and I swear the inference is not true."

"Don't say that, for you have come—let me think the reason of your coming what I like to think it. It can do you no harm. Come once more!"

He still held her hand. "Very well, then," she said. "Thus far you shall persuade me. I will meet you to-morrow night or the night after. Now let me go."

He released her hand, and they parted. The Duchess ran rapidly down the hill towards the neighbouring mansion of Verncombe Towers, and when he had watched her out of sight, he turned and strode off in the opposite direction. All then was silent and empty as before.

But only for a moment. When they had quite departed, another shape appeared upon the scene. He came from behind the trilithon. He was a man of stouter build than the first, and wore the boots and spurs of a horseman. Two things were at once obvious from this phenomenon: that he had watched the interview between the Captain and the Duchess; and that, though he probably had seen every movement of the couple, including the embrace, he had been too remote to hear the reluctant words of the lady's conversation—or, indeed, any words at all;—so that the meeting must have exhibited itself to his eye as the assignation of a pair of well-agreed lovers. But it was necessary that several years should elapse before the shepherd boy was old enough to reason out this.

The third individual stood still for a moment, as if deep in meditation; he crossed over to where the lady and gentleman had stood, and looked at the ground; then he too turned and went away, in a third direction, as widely divergent as possible from those taken by the two interlocutors. His course was towards the highway; and a few minutes afterwards the trot of a horse might have been heard upon its frosty surface, lessening till it died away upon the ear.

The boy remained in the hut, confronting the trilithon as if he expected yet more actors on the scene, but nobody else appeared. How long he stood with his little face against the loophole he hardly knew; but he was rudely awakened from his reverie by a punch in his back, and in the feel of it he familiarly recognised the stem of the old shepherd's crook.

"Blame thy young eyes and limbs, Bill Wills—now you have let the fire out, and you know I want it kept in! I thought something would go wrong with ye up here, and I couldn't bide in bed no more than thistledown on the wind, that I could not! Well, what's happened, fie upon ye?"

"Nothing."

"Ewes all as I left 'em?"

"Yes."

"Any lambs want bringing in?"

"No."

The shepherd relit the fire, and went out among the sheep with a lantern, for the moon was getting low. Soon he came in again.

"Blame it all—thou'st say that nothing hev happened; and one ewe hev twinned and is like to go off, and another is dying for want of half an eye of looking to! I told ye, Bill Wills, if anything went wrong to come down and call me; and this is how you have done it."

"You said I could go to sleep for a holliday; and I did."

"Don't you speak to your betters like that, young man, or you'll come to the gallows-tree! You didn't sleep all the time, or you wouldn't have been peeping out of that there hole! Now you can go home, and be up here again by breakfast time. I be an old man, and there's old men that deserve well of the world; but no—I must rest how I can!"

The elder shepherd then lay down inside the hut, and the boy went down the hill to the hamlet where he dwelt.

SECOND NIGHT.

When the next night drew on the actions of the boy were almost enough to show that he was thinking of the meeting he had witnessed, and of the promise wrung from the lady that she would come there again. As far as the sheep-tending arrangements were concerned to-night was but a repetition of the foregoing one. Between ten and eleven o'clock the old shepherd withdrew as usual for what sleep at home he might chance to get without interruption, making up the other necessary hours of rest at some time during the day; the boy was left alone.

The frost was the same as on the night before, except perhaps that it was a little more severe. The moon shone as usual, except that it was three-quarters of an hour later in its course; and the boy's condition was much the same, except

that he felt no sleepiness whatever. He felt, too, rather afraid; but upon the whole he preferred witnessing an assignation of strangers to running the risk of being discovered absent by the old shepherd.

It was before the distant clock of Verncombe Towers had struck eleven that he observed the opening of the second act of this midnight drama. It consisted in the appearance of neither lover nor Duchess, but of the third figure, the stout man booted and spurred, who came up from the easterly direction in which he had retreated the night before. He walked once round the trilithon and next advanced towards the clump concealing the hut, the moonlight shining full upon his face and revealing him to be the Duke. Fear seized upon the shepherd boy: the Duke was Jove himself to the rural population, whom to offend was starvation, homelessness, and death, and whom to look at was to be mentally scathed and dumbfounded. He closed the stove, so that not a spark of light appeared, and hastily buried himself in the straw that lay in a corner.

The Duke came close to the clump of furze and stood by the spot where his wife and the Captain had held their dialogue; he examined the furze as if searching for a hiding-place; and in doing so discovered the hut. The latter he walked round and then looked inside; finding it to all seeming empty, he entered, closing the door behind him and taking his place at the little circular window against which the boy's face had been pressed just before.

The Duke had not adopted his measures too rapidly, if his object were concealment. Almost as soon as he had stationed himself there eleven o'clock struck, and the slender young man who had previously graced the scene promptly reappeared from the north quarter of the down. The spot of assignation having, by the accident of his running forward on the foregoing night, removed itself from the Devil's Door to the clump of furze, he instinctively came thither, and waited for the Duchess where he had met her before.

But a fearful surprise was in store for him to-night, as well as for the trembling juvenile. At his appearance the Duke breathed more and more quickly, his breathings being distinctly audible to the crouching boy. The young man had hardly paused when the alert nobleman softly opened the door of the hut, and, stepping round the furze, came full upon Captain Fred.

"You have dishonoured her, and you shall die the death you deserve!" came to the shepherd's ears, in a harsh, hollow whisper through the boarding of the hut.

The apathetic and taciturn boy was excited enough to run the risk of rising and looking from the window. But he could see nothing for the intervening furze boughs, both the men having gone round to the side. What took place in the few following moments he never exactly knew. He discerned portion of a shadow in quick muscular movement: then there was the fall of something on the grass: then there was a stillness.

Two or three minutes later the Duke became visible round the corner of the hut, dragging by the collar the now inert body of the second man. The Duke dragged him across the open space towards the trilithon. Behind this ruin was a hollow, irregular spot, overgrown with furze and stunted thorns, and riddled by the old holes of badgers, its former inhabitants, who had now died out or departed. The Duke vanished into this depression with his burden, reappearing after the lapse of a few seconds. When he came forth he dragged nothing behind him.

He returned to the side of the hut, cleansed something on the grass, and again put himself on the watch, though not as before, inside the hut, but without, on the shady side. "Now for the second!" he said.

It was plain, even to the unsophisticated boy, that he now awaited the other person of the appointment—his wife, the Duchess—for what purpose it was terrible to think. He seemed to be a man of such determined temper that he would scarcely hesitate in carrying out a course of revenge to the bitter end. Moreover—though it was what the shepherd did not perceive—this was all the more probable, in that the moody Duke was labouring under the exaggerated impression which the sight of the meeting in dumb show had conveyed.

The jealous watcher waited long, but he waited in vain. From within the hut the boy could hear his occasional exclamations of surprise, as if he were almost disappointed at the failure of his assumption that his guilty Duchess would surely keep the tryst. Sometimes he stepped from the shade of the furze into the moonlight, and held up his watch to learn the time.

About half-past eleven he seemed to give up expecting her. He then went a second time to the hollow behind the trilithon, remaining there nearly a quarter of an hour. From this place he proceeded quickly over a shoulder of the declivity, a little to the left, presently returning on horseback, which proved that his horse had been tethered in some secret place down there. Crossing anew the down between the hut and the trilithon, and scanning the precincts as if to finally assure himself that she had not come, he rode slowly downwards in the direction of Verncombe Towers.

The juvenile shepherd thought of what lay in the hollow yonder; and no fear of the crook-stem of his superior officer was potent enough to detain him longer on that hill alone. Any live company, even the most terrible, was better than the company of the dead; so, running with the speed of a hare in the direction pursued by the horseman, he overtook the revengeful Duke at the second descent (where the Ringdon road crossed before you came to the old park entrance on that side—now closed up and the lodge cleared away, though at the time it was wondered why, being considered the most convenient gate of all).

Once within the sound of the horse's footsteps, Bill Wills felt comparatively comfortable; for, though in awe of the Duke because of his position, he had no moral repugnance to his companionship on account of the grisly deed he had committed, considering that powerful nobleman to have a right to do what he chose on his own lands. The Duke rode steadily on beneath his ancestral trees, the hoofs of his horse sending up a smart sound now that he had reached the hard road of the drive, and soon drew near the front door of his house, surrounded by parapets with square-cut battlements that cast a notched shade upon the gravelled terrace. These outlines were quite familiar to little Bill Wills, though nothing within their boundary had ever been seen by him.

When the rider approached the mansion a small turret door was quickly opened, and a woman came out. As soon as she saw the horseman's outlines she ran forward into the moonlight to meet him.

"Ah, dear—and are you come!" she said. "I heard Hero's tread just when you rode over the hill, and I knew it in a moment. I would have come further if I had been aware!"

"Glad to see me, eh?"

"How can you ask that?"

"Well; it is a lovely night for meetings."

"Yes, it is a lovely night."

The Duke dismounted and stood by her side. "Why should you have been listening at this time of night, and yet not expecting me?" he asked.





ENGRAVED BY W. J. PALMER.

"Why, indeed! There is a strange story attached to that, which I must tell you at once. But why did you come a night sooner than you said you would come? I am rather sorry—I really am!" (shaking her head playfully); "for as a surprise to you I had ordered a bonfire to be built, which was to be lighted on your arrival to-morrow; and now it is wasted. You can see the outline of it just out there."

The Duke looked across to a spot of rising glade, and saw the faggots in a heap. He then bent his eyes with a blank and puzzled air on the ground. "What is this strange story you have to tell me, that kept you awake?" he murmured.

"It is this—and it is really rather serious. My cousin Fred Pentridge—Captain Pentridge as he is now—was in his boyhood a great admirer of mine, as I think I have told you, though I was six years his senior. In strict truth, he was absurdly fond of me."

"You have never told me of that before."

"Then it was your sister I told—yes, it was. Well, you know I have not seen him for many years, and naturally I had quite forgotten his admiration of me in old times. But guess my surprise when the day before yesterday I received a mysterious note bearing no address, and found on opening it that it came from him. The contents frightened me out of my wits. He had returned from Canada to his father's house, and conjured me by all he could think of to meet him at once. But I think I can repeat the exact words, though I will show it to you when we get indoors. 'My dear cousin Harriet,' the note said; 'After this long absence you will be surprised at my sudden reappearance, and more by what I am going to ask. But if my life and future are of any concern to you at all, I beg that you will grant my request. What I require of you is, dear Harriet, that you meet me about eleven to-night by the Druid stones on Verncombe Down, about a mile from your house. I cannot say more, except to entreat you to come. I will explain all when you are there. The one thing is, I want to see you. Come alone. Believe me, I would not ask this if my happiness did not hang upon it—God knows how entirely! I am too agitated to say more.—Yours, FRED.' That was all of it. Now, of course, I ought not to have gone, as it turned out; but that I did not think of then. I remembered his impetuous temper, and feared that something grievous was impending over his head, while he had not a friend in the world to help him, or anyone except myself to whom he would care to make his trouble known. So I wrapped myself up and went to Verncombe Down at the time he had named. Don't you think I was courageous?"

"Very."

"When I got there—but shall we not walk on; it is getting cold?" The Duke, however, did not move. "When I got there he came; of course as a full grown man and officer, and not as the lad that I had known him. When I saw him I was sorry I had come. I can hardly tell you how he behaved. What he wanted I don't know even now; it seemed to be no more than the mere meeting with me. He held me by the hand—oh so tight—and would not let me go till I had promised to meet him again. His manner was so strange and passionate that I was afraid of him in such a lonely place, and I promised to come. Then I escaped—then I ran home—and that's all. When the time drew on this evening for the appointment—which, of course, I never intended to keep, I felt uneasy, lest when he found I meant to disappoint him he would come on to the house; and that's why I could not sleep. But you are so silent!"

"I have had a long journey."

"Then let us get into the house. Why did you come alone and unattended, like this?"

"It was my humour."

After a moment's silence, during which they moved on, she said, "I have thought of something which I hardly like to suggest to you. He said that if I failed to come to-night he would wait again to-morrow night. Now, shall we to-morrow night go to the hill together—just to see if he is there; and if he is, read him a lesson on his foolishness in nourishing this old passion, and sending for me so oddly, instead of coming to the house?"

"Why should we see if he's there?" said her husband, moodily.

"Because I think we ought to do something in it. Poor Fred! He would listen to you if you reasoned with him, and set our positions in their true light before him. It would be no more than Christian kindness to a man who unquestionably is very miserable from some cause or other. His head seems quite turned."

By this time they had reached the door, rung the bell, and waited. All the house seemed to be asleep; but soon a man came to them, the horse was taken away, and the Duke and Duchess went in.

THIRD NIGHT.

There was no help for it: Bill Wills was obliged to stay on duty, in the old shepherd's absence, this evening as before, or give up his post and living. He thought as bravely as he could of what lay behind the Devil's Door, but with no great success, and was therefore in a measure relieved, even if awe-stricken, when he saw the forms of the Duke and Duchess strolling across the frosted greenward. The Duchess was a few yards in front of her husband, and tripped on lightly.

"I tell you he has not thought it worth while to come again!" the Duke insisted, as he stood still, reluctant to walk further.

"He is more likely to come and wait all night; and it would be harsh treatment to let him do so a second time!"

"He is not here; so turn and come home."

"He seems not to be here, certainly. I wonder if anything has happened to him. If it has, I shall never forgive myself!"

The Duke, uneasily: "Oh, no. He has some other engagement."

"That is very unlikely."

"Or perhaps he has found the distance too far."

"Nor is that probable."

"Then he may have thought better of it."

"Yes—he may have thought better of it; if, indeed, he is not here all the time—somewhere in the hollow behind the Devil's Door. Let us go and see; it will serve him right to surprise him."

"Oh, he's not there!"

"He may be lying very quiet because of you," she said archly.

"Oh, no—not because of me!"

"Come, then. I declare, dearest, you lag like an unwilling schoolboy to-night, and there's no responsiveness in you! You are jealous of that poor lad, and it is quite absurd of you!"

"I'll come! I'll come! Say no more, Harriet!" And they crossed over the green.

Wondering what they would do, the young shepherd left the hut, and doubled behind the belt of furze, intending to stand near the trilithon unperceived. But, in crossing the few yards of open ground he was for a moment exposed to view.

"Ah—I see him at last!" said the Duchess.

"See him?" said the Duke. "Where?"

"By the Devil's Door—don't you notice a figure there? Ah, my poor lover-cousin, won't you catch it now!" And she laughed half-pityingly. "But what's the matter?" she asked, turning to her husband.

"It is not he!" cried the Duke hoarsely. "It can't be he!"

"No—it is not he. It is too small for him. It is a boy."

"Ah—I thought so. Boy, come here!"

The youthful shepherd advanced with apprehension.

"What are you doing here?"

"Keeping sheep, your Grace."

"Ah—you know me. Do you keep sheep here every night?"

"Off and on, my Lord Duke."

"And what have you seen here to-night or last night?" inquired the Duchess. "Any person waiting or walking about?"

The boy was silent.

"He has seen nothing," interrupted her husband, his eyes so forbiddingly fixed on the boy that they seemed to shine like points of fire. "Come, let us go. The air is too keen here to stand in long."

When they were gone the boy retreated to the hut and sheep, less fearful now than at first, familiarity with the situation having gradually overpowered his thoughts of the buried man. But he was not to be left alone long. When an interval had elapsed of about sufficient length for walking to and from Verncombe Towers, there reappeared from that direction the heavy form of the Duke. He now came alone.

The nobleman, on his part, seemed to have eyes no less sharp than the boy's, for he instantly recognised the latter among the ewes, and came straight towards him.

"Are you the shepherd lad I spoke to a short time ago?"

"I be, my Lord Duke."

"Now listen to me. Her Grace asked you what you had seen this last night or two up here, and you made no reply. I now ask the same thing, and you need not be afraid to answer. Have you seen anything strange these nights you have been watching here?"

"My Lord Duke, I be a poor heedless boy; and what I see I don't bear in mind."

"I ask you again," said the Duke, coming nearer. "Have you seen anything strange these nights you have been watching here?"

"O my Lord Duke! I be but the under-shepherd boy, and my father he was but your poor Grace's hedger, and my mother only the cinder-woman in the back-yard!—I fall asleep when left alone, and I see nothing at all!"

The Duke grasped the boy by the shoulder, and, directly impending over him, stared down into his face. "Did you see anything strange done here last night, I say?"

"O my Lord Duke, have mercy, and don't stab me!" cried the shepherd, falling on his knees. "I have never seen you walking here, or riding here, or lying-in-wait for a man, or dragging a heavy load!"

"H'm," said his interrogator, grimly, relaxing his hold. "It is well to know that you have never seen those things. Now, which would you rather, see me do those things now, or keep a secret all your life?"

"Keep a secret, my Lord Duke!"

"Sure you are able?"

"Oh, your Grace—try me!"

"Very well. And now—how do you like sheep-keeping?"

"Not at all. 'Tis lonely work for them that think of spirits. And I'm badly used."

"I believe you. You are too young for it. I must do something to make you more comfortable. You shall change this smockfrock for a real cloth jacket, and your thick boots for polished shoes. And you shall be taught what you have never yet heard of, and be put to school, and have bats and balls for the holidays, and be made a man of. But you must never say you have been a shepherd boy, and watched on the hills at night, for shepherd boys are not liked in good company."

"Trust me, my lord Duke."

"The very moment you forget yourself and speak of your shepherd days—this year, next year, in school, out of school, or riding in your carriage twenty years hence—at that moment my help will be withdrawn, and smash down you come to shepherding forthwith. You have parents, I think you say?"

"A widowed mother only, my Lord Duke."

"I'll provide for her, and make a comfortable woman of her; until you speak of—what?"

"Of my shepherd days, and what I saw here."

"Good. If you do speak of it—"

"Smash down she comes to widowng forthwith!"

"That's well—very well. But it's not enough. Come here." He took the boy across to the trilithon, and made him kneel down.

"Now this was once a holy place," resumed the Duke. "An altar stood here, erected to a venerable family of gods, who were known and talked of long before the God we know now. So that an oath sworn here is doubly an oath. Say this after me: 'May all the host above—angels and archangels, and principalities and powers—punish me; may I be tormented wherever I am—in the house or in the garden, in the fields or in the roads, in church or in chapel, at home or abroad, on land or at sea; may I be afflicted in eating and in drinking, in growing up and in growing old, in living and dying, inwardly and outwardly, and for always—if I ever speak of my life as a shepherd boy, or of what I have seen done on this Verncombe Down. So be it, and so be it. Amen and amen. Now kiss the stone."

The trembling boy repeated the words, and kissed the stone as desired.

The Duke led him off by the hand. That night the junior shepherd slept in Verncombe Towers, and the next day he was sent away for tuition to a remote village. Thence he went to a preparatory establishment, and in due course to a public school.

FOURTH NIGHT.

On a winter evening, many years subsequent to the abovementioned occurrences, the *ci-devant* shepherd sat in a well-furnished office in the north wing of Verncombe Towers, in the guise of an ordinary educated man of business. He appeared at this time as a person of six or seven-and-thirty, though actually he was several years younger. A worn and restless glance of the eye now and then, when he lifted his head to search for some letter or paper which had been mislaid, seemed to denote that his was not a mind so thoroughly at ease as his surroundings might have led an observer to expect. His pallor, too, was remarkable for a countryman. He was professedly engaged in writing, but he shaped not a word. He had sat there only a few minutes when, laying down his pen and pushing back his chair, he rested a hand uneasily on each of the chair-arms, and looked on the floor.

Soon he arose, and left the room. His course was along a passage which ended in a central octagonal hall; crossing this he knocked at a door. A faint, though deep, voice told him to come in. The room he entered was the library, and it was tenanted by a single person only—his patron the Duke.

During this long interval of years the Duke had lost all his

heaviness of build. He was, indeed, almost a skeleton; his white hair was thin, and his hands were nearly transparent.

"Oh—Wills?" he murmured. "Sit down. What is it?"

"Nothing new, your Grace. Nobody to speak of has written, and nobody has called."

"Ali—what then? You look concerned."

"Old times have come to life, as they sometimes will."

"Old times be cursed—which old times are they?"

"That Christmas week nineteen years ago, when the late Duchess's cousin Frederick implored her to meet him on Verncombe Down. I saw the meeting—it was just such a night as this—and I saw more. She met him once, but not the second time."

"Wills, shall I recall some words to you—the words of an oath taken on that hill by a shepherd boy?"

"It is unnecessary. He has strenuously kept that oath and promise. Since that night no sound of his shepherd life has crossed his lips—even to yourself. But do you wish to hear more, or do you not, your Grace?"

"I wish to hear no more," said the Duke, sullenly.

"Very well; let it be so. But a time seems coming—may be quite near at hand—when, in spite of my lips, that episode will allow itself to go undivulged no longer."

"I wish to hear no more!" repeated the Duke.

"You need be under no fear of treachery from me," said the steward, somewhat bitterly. "I am a man to whom you have been kind—no patron could have been kinder. You have clothed and educated me; have installed me here; and I am not unmindful. But what of it—has your Grace gained much by my stanchness? I think not. There was great excitement about Captain Pentridge's disappearance, but I spoke not a word. And his body has never been found. For nineteen years I have wondered what you did with him. Now I know. A circumstance that occurred this afternoon recalled the time to me most forcibly. To make it certain to myself that all was not a dream, I went up there with a spade; I searched, and saw enough to know that a skeleton lies there in a closed badger's hole."

"Wills, do you think the Duchess guessed?"

"She never did, I am sure, to the day of her death."

"Did you leave all as you found it on the hill?"

"I did."

"What made you think of going up there this particular afternoon?"

"What your Grace says you don't wish to be told."

The Duke was silent; and the stillness of the evening was so marked that there reached their ears from the outer air the sound of a tolling bell.

"What is that bell tolling for?" asked the nobleman.

"For what I came to tell you of, your Grace."

"You torment me—it is your way!" said the Duke, querulously. "Who's dead in the village?"

"The oldest man—the old shepherd."

"Dead at last—how old is he?"

"Ninety-four."

"And I am only seventy. I have four-and-twenty years to the good!"

"I served under that old man when I kept sheep on Verncombe Down. And he was on the hill that second night, when I first exchanged words with your Grace. He was on the hill *all the time*; but I did not know he was there—nor did you."

"Ah!", said the Duke, starting up. "Go on—I yield the point—you may tell!"

"I heard this afternoon that he was at the point of death. It was that which set me thinking of that past time—and induced me to search on the hill for what I have told you. Coming back I heard that he wished to see the Vicar to confess to him a secret he had kept for near twenty years—'out of respect to my Lord the Duke'—something that he had seen committed on Verncombe Down when returning to the flock on a December night nineteen years ago. I have thought it over. He had left me in charge that evening; but he was in the habit of coming back suddenly, lest I should have fallen asleep. That night I saw nothing of him, though he had promised to return. He must have returned, and—found reason to keep in hiding. It is all plain. The next thing is that the Vicar went to him two hours ago. Further than that I have not heard."

"It is quite enough. I will see the Vicar at daybreak to-morrow."

"What to do?"

"Stop his

house, where he let himself in by a window that stood open—the one probably by which he had come out. Wills softly closed the window behind his patron, and then retired homeward to await the revelations of the morning, deeming it unnecessary to alarm the house.

However, he felt uneasy during the remainder of the night, no less on account of the Duke's personal condition than because of that which was imminent next day. Early in the morning he called at Verncombe Towers. The blinds were down, and there was something singular upon the porter's face when he opened the door. The steward inquired for the Duke.

The man's voice was subdued as he replied, "Sir, I am sorry to say that his Grace is dead! He left his room some time in the night, and wandered about nobody knows where. On returning to the upper floor he lost his balance and fell down stairs."

The steward told the tale of the Down before the Vicar had spoken. Wills had always intended to do so after the death of the Duke. The consequences to himself he underwent cheerfully; but his life was not prolonged. He died, a farmer, at the Cape, when still somewhat under thirty-nine years of age.

The splendid Verncombe breeding flock is as renowned as ever, and, to the eye, resembles in every particular what it was in earlier times; but the animals which composed it on the occasion of the events here recorded are divided by many ovine generations from its members now. Lambing Corner has long since ceased to be used for lambing purposes, though the name still lingers on as the appellation of the spot. This abandonment of site may be partly owing to the removal of the high furze bushes which lent such convenient shelter at that date. Partly, too, it may be due to another circumstance. For it is said by present shepherds in that district that during the nights of Christmas-week flitting shapes are seen in the open space around the trilithon, together with the gleam of a weapon, and the shadow of a man dragging a burden into the hollow. But of these things there is no certain testimony.

THE CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

(See Illustration.)

Youthful critics so demure,
Let your solemn faces brighten;
Here are pictures to allure—
Here are stories to enlighten.

Lift your lustrous eyes awhile,
As you turn the pages over;
Ah! I think I see you smile—
Lurking laughter I discover.

Let the merry music come!
Let me see the rosy dimple—
There now—make yourselves at home;
Youth is best when sweet and simple.

I will sit between the two—
Now the ice is fairly broken—
We will look the Number through
While your little thoughts are spoken.

You shall hear the Christmas chimes
Ere your eyes are closed in slumber;
If you wake and rise betimes
You shall have the Christmas Number.

MASON JACKSON.

"TURKEY IS HOFF!"

(See Illustration.)

He has given the Housekeeper leave for her party;
The Office "remembered,"—forgetting not one,—
In the old-fashioned manner, full-handed and hearty,
And now the old bachelor's day's work is done.
At the garrulous "Gate," this raw morning, his duties
Began, as he chose, with sagacity sage,
A corpulent barrel of Whitstable beauties,
And saw them dispatched by the Edmonton stage.

Up the hill, from the Gate of mellifluous Billing—
From shell, scale, and fin, on to feather and fur—
To spend gracious guineas both eager and willing,
Taking care that each present was labelled *for her!*
'Tis his way. Why the day of all days in December'd
Not seem like itself were the mothers and wives
Of his folk, friends, and kindred, not richly "remembered,"
By Leadenhall marking one day in their lives!

Did his duties end there? No. Bless him! Though lonely
Is the whimsical, warm-hearted bachelor's lot,

At such times on the elders his thoughts run not only,
The rosy-cheeked youngsters are never forgot!

From the wonderful cherub, all dimples and crowing,
To the sweet little maiden, all coyness and curls—

Or that bold imp of mischief, more mischievous growing—

Each one is "remembered," boys, babies, and girls!

His labours are over. The time for enjoyment

Is come, for his lunch (like his spirits) was light;

Even making folk happy's a tiring employment;

His season of solace arrives with the night.

An undisturbed hour (may be two) in the tavern,

Which for many dull years the old boy has dubbed "mine"—

In the tranquillest, cosiest, *Englishest* cavern

That ever beseeemed a brave turkey and chine—

Shall be his. As the frosty nor'-easter he faces

His fancy is busy, the thoughts of the day

Give a light to his eyes and a spring to his paces—

Not a heart in all Chepe is so brimmingly gay!

The deep bells of Bow and of Cripplegate tell him,

As they answer Paul's challenge, of tender "lang syne"—

Of dim Christmas Eves and the fates that befel him—

Of his loves, and his—"Now for that turkey and chine!"

A dive from the dark with a chuckle they know, he

Makes straight to his corner; a signal to John;

A satisfied glance at the napery snowy;

And he cheerily orders his "Turkey for one."

Ah! John, had thy words melted forth in a murmur,

Without the stern aspirate—with a suave cough—

His lip had not drooped and his look had been firmer,

At the sentence implacable "Turkey is hoff!"

Though he carve for his sisters, at Tot'nham, to-morrow,

At the prospect his fancy doth flauntingly scoff,

The capon, the sirloin, the goose, are but sorrow,

He cannot forget, John, that "Turkey is hoff!"

'Tis your dinner, not his, John—'tis eating, not dining;

He sips, without relish his bottle of wine,

For, in spite of himself, while he eats he's repining,

Beset by those phantoms, the turkey and chine.

BYRON WEBBER.

THE HAUNTED ROCK: A LEGEND OF PORTH GUERRON COVE.

BY W. W. FENN.

Porth Guerron is in Cornwall. If you do not know the place it must be because, in your exploration of the hundred and one similar villages abounding on that romantic coast, you have overlooked the one—and that one must be Porth Guerron.

Like many of its fellows, it is situated in a little ravine in the dark serpentine rock running down to the sea from the higher land of gorse and heather-clad moor. Most of the thatched, and occasionally slate-roofed cottages, with their irregular patches of garden, nestle right and left among the ferny, craggy banks of the steep winding way by courtesy called a street, by which the traveller reaches the beach. Some few other dwellings, looking from the sea like huge white-winged gulls, are to be seen perched here and there upon apparently inaccessible ledges of cliff, whence they command many a fine peep across the "wide, wide world." The square-towered tiny church on the verge of a few green pastures and corn-fields stands at the head of the village, and the water-mill, worked by a miniature mountain torrent, stands at the bottom. Only a little below this, begins a conglomeration of capstans, beach-houses, boats and boat-sheds, anchors, spars, chains, and the rest of the rumble-tumble of the fishing-trade, which holds high change on the shore. Here the coast, broadening out with a curve on either hand, forms a secluded cove between two arms of frowning precipitous cliff, which seem stretching forth to embrace this lapful of deep green-blue sea. The rugged and lofty formation of the land almost hides the existence of the little industrial hive until you come close upon it; and, so far as its importance in the world is concerned, you may be excused for overlooking it altogether—as you probably have done. But, if so, you have missed a very beautiful and romantic picture, and will scarcely have realised to its full extent the superstitious side of the Cornish mind, for there is attached to this place a legend in which many of the inhabitants believe with an almost religious intensity. It was told to me some years ago by a brave and intelligent old salt, one Jacob Sellar by name, a native of the village, whose implicit credence of the story supplied a strong example of the characteristics of his race.

I was returning from America in one of the Cunard boats. Sellar was a seaman on board, and spun for me many a yarn, ghostly and otherwise. I had lately witnessed some unaccountable spiritual manifestations in the States, and my natural scepticism on the question had, I confess, been considerably shaken—my mind was full of the subject, so that I listened with more interest than I might otherwise have done to this particular story, which greatly impressed me, not only from the man's manner of telling it, but from its weird nature, and I never forgot it.

Thus, when fate took me to the western crags of England in the autumn of 1877, and I came plump upon the nestling village of Porth Guerron, as most people do, before being aware of it, I recognised on the instant the feature in the landscape which marked it as the background to the legend I had heard from the lips of old Jacob.

This was a tall isolated mass of almost inaccessible rock, standing about two hundred yards away from the western headland of the cove. I call it "isolated," because it nearly always is so, for, except about an hour at the lowest of spring tides, in very calm weather, it is entirely cut off from the mainland. But on these occasions a narrow ridge of soft, sandy shingle is left bare, looking as if it would form an easy path to the rude promontory. Yet a little closer inspection soon shows this idea to be fallacious, inasmuch as, except by a boat, you cannot even reach the main shore end of the little causeway, jutting out as it does from the base of the sheer down cliff. Hence the Leopard's Head, as the crag is named, is never scaled, being inaccessible except at the one spot where its rocky spurs lose themselves in the sand of the narrow connecting ridge; thus it is left to the undisputed possession of the myriad sea-birds that make it their home.

The fishing-boats on their way to and from their anchorage in the cove always keep outside the Leopard's Head, and are never tempted to make a short cut westward by passing between it and the main land. However high the tide or calm the sea, they avoid this narrow channel, with its treacherous, never-absent ground swell; for, apart from its natural dangers, the superstition runs to the effect that a malignant demon stretches a huge iron net across the opening. Invisible to him until his craft is entangled within its fatal meshes, the mariner who, from ignorance or hardihood, should attempt the passage will, it is declared, struggle in vain to extricate himself, and must inevitably founder. So ran the legend, as told to me by the old salt aforesaid.

"Did he believe it?" I asked him.

"Yes, indeed, he did," he said; "he had good reason: he had seen the net once himself when a lad, and it was a terrible and strange business. It was the end of September, 1847, and a boat, during a heavy squall from the westward, was trying to make the cove by the short cut—and surely, just as she got betwixt the Leopard and the main land, in the Leopard's grip as the channel is called, she seemed to kind o' stick fast, although she had been running quite free the moment before. There was plenty of water, and she couldn't hardly have struck on the bar or little beach-way. But, howsoever, whether she did or not, she couldn't get through—the heavy seas broke over her of course, directly she was brought to—pooped her, in fact, and down she went with all hands, two men and a boy. The boy was my brother Isaac," continued Jacob Sellar, looking very grave when telling me the tale; "but he was saved; that is, he was picked up in the cove senseless, but they managed to restore him to life; the other two was never found even. There's a many curious things connected with that calamity, Sir, I can tell you," he added, "one of which is that, it being pretty nigh dark at the time, nobody couldn't exactly make out what did happen, 'cept that we all saw, as we stood on the beach, the net suddenly stretched across the channel, and could see that it was that as the craft got tangled in, as it brought her up, and turned her broadside on to the seas. The water was breaming at the time, you know, and this made the net plain to us, for it seemed to come up out of the sea just in front of the boat, and was sparkling all over its meshes just like silver, with the phosphorescent light."

"And you saw this?" I asked.

"That I did, Sir, with these very eyes."

"And the boy, your brother, when he came to his senses, what had he to say about it?"

"Ah! that's where 'tis, you see, Sir—poor chap, he never did come rightly to his senses—it gave him such a scare as he never got over—he's been kind o' cracky like ever since. He's a bit younger than I am, though elderly, you know, by this time. But he never quite got his wits back. He is harmless, don't you know, but dazed and silly, 'pecially at times."

"And he could never give any account of how the accident happened? How it was the boat came to grief in the Leopard's Grip?"

"No, Sir; he warn't never able to tell nothing at all about it—never a word."

"Well," I remarked, after a pause, "it was true the poor fellows lost their lives, anyhow, whether the devil caught them in his net or not?"

"Yes, Sir; but another curious thing is, these two men—I remember them well—Tom Penthall and Raymond Sass, were partners in the boat, and said to be great friends, and staunch to one another, but they were both in love with the same girl, Alice Dournelle, and it was said there had been words about her between 'em more than once, and especially just before they got lost. Another curious thing yet," went on old Jacob, presently, "is that some of the people looking on declared that, as well as seeing the net as I have just told you, when the boat foundered, they saw one of the men get ashore on the lower rocks of the Leopard's Head, and that he was seen standing there and waving his arms till night quite hid him."

"But could not they get him off?"

"No; no boat durst go near the place in such a sea."

"And next morning?"

"The next morning he was gone, been carried away again, if so be as he had ever been seen there at all—though I make no doubt he had."

"And the girl? What became of her?"

"Ah! that's the most curiosest part of it all," said the seaman, growing graver and graver and slower and slower in his utterances; "more curious than anything I've told you yet, Sir; and this I've seen myself, too, many times before I came away to sea. Poor Alice Dournelle took on terribly when she knew her lover was drowned; for she gave the preference, it was said, to Raymond Sass. Howsomever, a couple of years afterwards she died, in a kind o' decline, like; and she's the phantom of Porth Guerron Cove."

"What? haunts the place, I suppose?" I said, smiling.

"Yes; but you needn't laugh, Sir. This is a fact. I tell you I've seen her more than a score of times; and I do hear she may be seen even now, specially in September—about the anniversary, as you may say."

"Well, what does one see? What did you see?"

"Why, I've seen her standing in the dusk on the rocks of the Leopard, all lighted up by the phosphorus, just as if she had come out of the sea, as we saw the net that night. Well, I've seen her just so. I remember her by sight, when she was alive, quite well, and I've seen her looking just as she did then, only all lighted up, as I say. Lots of the Porth Guerron folk have seen her; and they'll tell you so if you ever go there. My poor brother can always see her. He has a kind of gift that way. Like enough, you'd see her yourself."

"And what does she do?"

"Oh! do? Why, she seems to come out o' the sea, as I tell you, and stand on the rocks, and then she'll go up higher and higher. Not seeming to clamber, but as if she was going up and up, as a spirit would, don't you know—floating like: rising, rising, till she reaches the flattish top of the Leopard's Head, and there she'll stay for hours passing to and fro, breaming with the light all the time."

"Why, then, she makes a sort of lighthouse," I said, still smiling; "a very useful phantom, truly."

"'Tain't no good for you to laugh, Sir," continued Jacob, yet more seriously, evidently not relishing my scepticism. "I tell you I've seen her over and over again, as you may if you ever goes to Porth Guerron."

And now I was at Porth Guerron; and now, as I have said, the old salt's story came back to my mind with a renewal of the interest it had originally created. The vexed question of how far we are permitted to have contact with the vast unseen has never ceased to interest me since my visit to the States, but a subsequent deep immersion in the stern realities of life had left me no opportunities for pursuing the subject. Here, however, was one at hand unexpectedly put before me; and, although I had attributed Jacob Sellar's strong belief to the natural superstition of the Cornish people, there was, nevertheless, an earnestness in his manner, and an intelligence peeping out beneath his uncultured speech, which forbade one to disregard it; and since, for the present, I was a wanderer and my time all my own, some of it I determined should be spent upon the scene of the mystery. I have given but the barest outline of my talk with Sellar. It was resumed over and over again, and it elicited so many circumstantial details, that, if they were not the result of a too fervid imagination, the phantom of Porth Guerron Cove was a manifestation equal to anything I had ever heard of, and well worth investigating.

Snug quarters at the little inn were readily obtained, and in the course of two or three days I had scraped acquaintance with many of the hearty, honest, kindly natives, including Jacob's brother, old Isaac Sellar, the poor chap who had been "kind o' cracky like" ever since that fatal time when he nearly lost his life in the Leopard's Grip. He was quite a feature of the place, much respected by his fellow-villagers, and not at all incapable of work. But I was told he had periodical fits of abstraction and wandering, which seemed to lift him quite above the world, and gave him a dazed and incoherent manner; otherwise, he was a strong, fine-looking man with a long grey beard, and with quite the air of a prophet and seer, as he professed himself to be. He was also a preacher at times, when the spirit moved him; and though, undoubtedly "kind o' cracky," he was by no means bereft of intelligence.

All the fisher-folk were ready to talk about the phantom, and to believe in it; but I found very few after all, besides poor crazy Isaac, who admitted having seen it. In his garrulous, half-witted way, however, he was very strong on the point, throwing into it a sort of religious fervour, and they said it was the only one on which he was thoroughly sane. He confirmed many of the details given me by his brother. To wit, the spirit of Alice Dournelle was only to be seen by ordinary folk in the gloaming, and then only under conditions of tide and weather similar to those which had prevailed when her lover lost his life, now thirty years ago. About the anniversary, too, she was more frequently visible than at any other time. But he (Isaac Sellar) could see her almost whenever he liked, he said, because he had faith, and could see farther into things than most folk. He had been a dreamer and a seer all his life, he avowed; he saw many strange things, of which other people had no idea, but sometimes, when they would believe him, he could make them see strange things too. In fact, from his own account of himself, Isaac Sellar would have been considered a first-rate medium in America—he seemed endowed with all the qualifications. In answer to my inquiry if he thought he could make me see Alice Dournelle, he said he thought he could.

"I doubt not but ye will see her yourself," he added, after looking at me in an odd, vacant, yet penetrating manner; "ye have the eye of belief, the face of a believer. It all depends on faith, as the Scripture tells us—faith in something just beyond what ye can touch and lay hold of. If ye'll walk





DRAWN BY W. H. OVEREND.

ENGRAVED BY W. L. MOSES.

NEARING HOME.

"As firm as oak and free from care
The sailor holds his heart at sea."

"You mean," I said, "that her spirit never strays far from the place where he was drowned?"

"That is my meaning," answered Isaac; "she dwells with the sea-birds among the rocks of the Leopard's Head, and sometimes, with them, dives deep beneath the treacherous waters which encircle it; dives deep, I believe, to where he lies many a fathom down. Then when she comes up she breams with light, and waves her arms, often beckoning and pointing, and in the dusk, or by night, she will be visible even to some of those without faith: even the fool who hath said in his heart 'there is no God,' may see her then. But I—I can see her in all lights, at all times, as plainly as the birds with whom she skims and flies around the Head. Sometimes, too, I hear her voice mingling with their notes. Faint but clear it comes to me—a painful wailing cry that the unbeliever will tell you is naught but that of the kitty-wake and sea gulls; but I know the difference, though she speaks no word. Surely to-morrow will be, of all days, the day to look for her presence. Thirty years will then have come and gone to the very hour at nightfall when Raymond died. Early and late she will be there, and as the dawn creeps into the air ye shall see her if ye'll come and bide by me."

You will think me as crazy as poor Isaac himself, when I say that I listened with deep interest to these half mystic, half prophetic, but most earnestly delivered utterances. But we have all a crazy side to our characters (politely called a weakness), and I am bound to repeat that what I had seen in the States had vastly developed this my weakness, and had left the truth of spiritualism quite a moot point in my mind. To me there was as much reason in this man's pretensions to hold communion with the spirits of the departed as any of the mediums with whom I had come in contact: albeit he knew little of the ways in which such powers were used. Why, then, should I not place myself in his mediumistic hands, and see if he could put me *en rapport* with this troubled spirit from the "vasty deep," after the manner of some of my late American experiences? I determined to do so, and it was arranged that I should meet him the following morning, between five and six, on that part of the shore commanding the nearest view of the haunted rock.

Verily a wild-goose chase it might have appeared even to the fisher-folk of Porth Guerron, had they known our purpose when the few early movers among them saw us meet at the foot of the village, and stroll away along the lonely shore in the semi-darkness of that chill, grey, misty morning.

A perfect calm prevailed—but heavy banks of dense sea-fog hung about the headlands, now shrouding and now slightly revealing their gloomy masses. At first the Leopard stood out gaunt and huge against the grey surroundings, but as we approached it became more and more obscure. The tardy dawn just gave enough light to indicate our whereabouts, lending a most weird aspect to the scene. When we had gone about half a mile round the western arm of the bay, Isaac, who kept in advance of me, and scarcely ever spoke, suddenly stopped, and, stretching back a hand, whispered—

"Hold on, Sir—I saw her but now—take my hand and turn your eyes due west. See where she hovers with the sea-birds round the Leopard's base!"

I gazed eagerly in the direction indicated, and faintly beheld a form, which for one moment certainly did look like that of a woman clothed in silver light, rising out of the sea, but in another, like nothing but that of a fantastic wreath of mist. It was gone as rapidly as it had appeared—as rapidly as though it had been but the flashing whiteness from the outstretched pinions of the birds that by myriads soared and swooped through the heavy folds of the fog—gone as though it had been but a passing fancy, an ocular illusion, momentary, vague, and unsubstantial as the misty air itself.

"Ye saw her, Sir, I doubt not," then went on my guide. "Silence, patience, and faith, and ye shall see her again."

We had reached the utmost limits of the shingly shore, where the frowning cliffs at the western horn of the cove stretched precipitously into the sea and stopped farther progress. Fifty yards beyond this barrier began the sandy causeway connecting the mainland with the Leopard. But had the tide been out even we could not have seen it from our position; and the Leopard, when the fog lifted a little, lay before us completely isolated. Nothing in nature could well have looked more weird and ghostly than did the scene, or more in harmony with our purpose. The day was breaking languidly, and still shedding but the faintest, palest light, whilst the restless fog-banks, swirling to and fro, might have been likened to giant spectres as they swept across the oily ocean, or clung to the towering cliffs in strange, fantastic forms. An intense chill was in the air, which was greatly increased when, every now and then, the grey mist enveloped us in its ghostly folds, shutting out everything beyond an arm's length, and seeming to cut us off from the world of fact and light.

During one of the densest of these visitations, I felt the rough, broad palm of Isaac close tightly on mine; and through a gap which suddenly appeared in the obscurity surrounding us I once more saw the female form in strong relief against the dark crags of the Leopard. Now there was no mistake about it. Bathed in the same translucent light, there it plainly was, floating in mid-air, as one has seen angels represented in pictures, and slowly waving one arm, half-beckoning and pointing upwards. Say it was some three hundred yards distant across the water—say that it was still vague and vapour-like, semi-transparent in parts, as the fog itself—say that I was out of my mind, or in a dream, or unduly acted on by those Transatlantic experiences and the imaginings arising therefrom, which old Isaac had rekindled: say all this, if you please; but I say distinctly that with these eyes I saw a woman's form, palpable, unmistakable, floating upwards across the face of the cliff, pointing and beckoning. The features at such a distance, of course, could not be discerned—nor do I say that I could see any details. All was merged into the unsubstantial substance—if I may use the paradox—of silvery light; but the form and action were distinct. For two minutes or more, it may have been, the vision was so far clearly before me; nor did it dissolve into the mist, of which, I admit, it seemed composed, until the figure reached, in its slow ascent, the topmost verge of the isolated crag. Then the fog again shut it all out, and for a while held us in its weird gloom. But soon after this it lifted, a soft breeze sprang up, and the cheering rays of the morning sun restored us to warmth and reality.

Beyond a momentary look of triumph which shot from old Isaac's lack-lustre eyes as he turned them on me, little or nothing passed between us as we retraced our steps, and I had full time to cogitate over this strange experience. At length I said, as we got back among the boats,

"How long is it since the Leopard was explored?" Isaac shook his head, as he answered,

"It never was explored; no one can land there—no one ever goes nearer to it than we have been. If they did, the iron net which the evil spirit of the place stretches across the channel, and which cost Raymond his life, and made my wits to wander, would wind itself round and strangle the life out of those who should dare to brave the dangers of the crag."

"But I am told," said I, "one could manage to land there, when the sand is exposed, at very low tide."

"Aye, but you would not bide there long—the net would be shot over you as surely as fate."

"There are spring tides now, I think," I went on; "when will the sand be clearest?"

"At this evening's ebb; it was nearly clear this morning when we were first there. This evening the tide will run out farther, and be dead low water somewhere nigh to five o'clock."

"Then," said I, decidedly, "if the sea holds smooth I'll land there myself, and have a closer look at the place where this troubled spirit wanders."

This determination was the result of my cogitation, for, notwithstanding what I had seen, I had no dread of, nor belief in the existence of this direful net—that part of the story was, doubtless, founded on some antique myth, as old as the crag itself. If I understood spiritual manifestations aright, they always pointed to a purpose, and it is nothing but man's own wilful blindness and scepticism which hides from him their end and aim, and leads him in his arrogance to ask, "What is their use; what good ever comes from these departed souls 'revisiting the glimpses of the moon,' and by sights, signs, or sounds, holding converse with us of the visible world?"

Isaac's face was something to see as I announced my resolve, and, in spite of all persuasion and argument, he entirely refused to accompany me on the expedition. He declared his conviction that I should never return alive, and that I should find no one in Porth Guerron who would go with me, adding—

"I doubt whether they'll even lend ye a boat, if they know your bent."

I was so fully determined, however, that by an hour before low water that evening I had hired the lightest row-boat in the place, and, keeping my object to myself, was afloat in the bay under pretext of simple amusement. Old Isaac reluctantly promised to say nothing of my intention, and, though doing all he could to dissuade me, helped me to push the boat off from the beach. As I pulled out, I saw his tall, gaunt figure passing along the shore towards the point we had occupied in the morning.

It was a lovely, soft, windless, autumn evening, as the sun sank towards the west, and, keeping my eye upon the tide, I had lazily pulled to within twenty boats' length of the sandy ridge when the thin line of rippling breakers marking its position faded away and left it bare. Then I gave way lustily, and in a few minutes the boat's nose ran softly up on to the sand just below the spur of the fatal crag. Springing ashore, I made her fast by the grapnel I had ready in her bows. An athlete, and a fairish cragsman, I soon managed to scale the lower declivities, and before long I had clambered well-nigh to the top of the Leopard's Head. I will not stop to describe the wild beauty of the scene stretching around me, nor do more than hint at the strange undercurrent of feeling which had prompted me to make this exploration; but a conviction had taken root in my mind that I might by it gain some clue to the purpose of the manifestation I had witnessed—a conviction, as I have said, that there had been an object in it, and that I might trace this object out. Thus I began examining and surveying every rift and fissure, cleft, and ledge of this wild storm-beaten islet; this hitherto undisputed home of the sea-birds, which, astounded by my audacity, at first seemed so reluctant to move that I might almost have captured many with my hands. But at length the whole colony was on the wing—swirling, swooping, hovering, until the air was darkened with them as by a cloud, and their shrill, piping, and discordant notes nearly deafened me.

Half an hour passed, and by the time I had wandered wherever foothold was possible, all over and around the top of the plateau, twilight was setting in. I was descending by the way I had come, and had got a short distance down, when, upon a rocky shelf just below a strangely beetling crag, my eye fell upon an object which startled me, and instantly riveted my attention. Getting close to the edge of the overhanging rock the better to look down upon this discovery, I all but lost my footing through the shock which the spectacle then gave me, for there, partially coiled under shelter of the projecting cliff, lay a human skeleton, bleached and mouldering, with the face of the skull turned upwards to the sky—the hollow sockets of the eyes seeming to meet mine with a horrible, imploring expression. When the amazement caused by this ghastly sight a little subsided, I began to realise the fact that in it perhaps lay the very clue I was looking for! How had the unhappy being whose remains lay thus exposed before me come there? Instantly I thought of Raymond Sass, and the account Jacob Sellar had given me of either he or his companion being seen clinging to the rocks when their boat foundered in the Leopard's Grip, just thirty years ago this very night! If these bleaching bones were indeed those of the hapless fisherman, and it seemed the likely solution, had I not discovered the purpose for which the restless spirit of Alice Dournelle had ever since haunted this wild and supposedly inaccessible rock?

Well! not to prolong my tale, I got back to my boat, and as soon as it touched the shore of the cove, without waiting to answer the questions with which I was assailed, I hastened straight away to the vicarage, and communicated my discovery to the incumbent of the square-towered, tiny church at the head of the village. He was a pompous, unsociable man, whom I had rather avoided, and, although at first he seemed to entirely discredit my statement—for, unwise, I told him how I had been led to visit the Leopard—I convinced him of its truth.

In the end, he took such steps as led to the interment in the churchyard, by the grave of Alice Dournelle, of the remains of poor Raymond Sass. That they were his there could be no doubt, inasmuch as, lying with them besides the remains of some other slowly perishable trifles, such as a tobacco-box, knife, &c., there was found a little trinket in the shape of a heart. On it was engraved his name, and that of Alice, the donor, and he had evidently worn it round his neck by the little chain to which it was attached.

One word more about Isaac Sellar and my fisher friends. Although I had, for a few of them, dispelled the fable of the iron net and had shown that access to the rock was easy, and without danger, he entirely refused to make one of the small party who were at length persuaded to accompany me on a second visit, to assist in the removal of all that was left of their lost comrade.

And as to the phantom? Well; it has never appeared again. Even Isaac Sellar, whom I had a talk with only last autumn, has never seen it, though three years have passed since I cleared up the mystery by restoring to rest and peace the erewhile troubled spirit of Alice Dournelle—for that I did this by procuring for her lover Christian burial I have no manner of doubt.

My experiences at Porth Guerron have finally determined my wavering belief in the truth of spiritual manifestations. I can no longer doubt that they have their object, and that they have a real existence for those whose minds are rightly attuned, and who can, as Isaac put it, have "faith in something just beyond what ye can touch and lay hold of."

A GHOST STORY.

(See Illustration.)

"You're better far in bed!" she said,
The dame so ancient and so grey,
She who, for fifty years, had served
The house, where now she rules, they say.
"You'll not to bed? then sit you here,
My Ladies Maude and Clare, and all,
I'll tell you of that lady sad,
Whose portrait hangs on yonder wall.
"Three hundred years are past and gone,
Since she, that lady sweet though proud,
Came in the May-time o'er the moors,
And on a milkwhite palfrey rode.
"Beside her, wild Sir Geoffrey passed,
They came here in their honeymoon;
Which scarce a moon endured, alas!
Its sweetness turned to bitter, soon.
"For wild Sir Geoffrey grew more wild;
The husband—who had lately sworn
To love and cherish—now repaid
Her tenderness with strife and scorn.
"The gentle wife could only weep;
All night alone she sat in tears,
Till, as the wintry morning dawned,
A whisper seemed to reach her ears.
"Who trusted Geoffrey, shall have woe,
But still must after Geoffrey go.
She, starting, woke; the dream had flown;
She found, that day, her lord was gone.
"Till came the chilly winter time,
When all the land was wrapt in snow,
The lady waited his return;
But oft would through the castle go—
"Along the corridors and rooms,
And up the stairs of lofty towers,
Where lords of ancient fame had dwelt,
And ladies kept their silken bower.
"But chiefly did her footsteps stay
In that great Hall of Portraits, where
From floor to ceiling, closely ranged,
Were pictured lords, and ladies fair.
"Among those sombre painted folk,
So many Geffreys met her gaze,
The lady called on them by name,
And told her grief; it was her craze.
"They answered nought to all her cries,
Nor once an eye of pity bent
On her, the suppliant, who implored
Release from this bewilderment.
"On Christmas Eve, when happy chimes
Of village church-bells filled the air,
The lady's frantic sorrow drove
Her lonely heart to wild despair.
"And in that hall, where faces grave
Of earls and barons, knights and dames,
Sir Geoffrey's ancestors of yore,
Guarded their titles and their names,
"She singled out the portrait stern
Of him, the Old Sir Geoffrey, Knight
Crusader, foremost of their line
Renowned in council and in fight.
"And, calling him to help her case,
'Sir Geoffrey, thee I trust!' she said,
And on her knees, with covered eyes,
Felt half in hope, and half in dread.
"Then, glimmering in the moonlight ray
That showed the knight in armour cold,

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BRINGING HOME THE YULE LOG.

ROYAL CHRISTMASES.

Many interesting particulars of how Christmas was kept by our Sovereigns in days gone by have been bequeathed to us, from which it appears that it was not only celebrated with the utmost hospitality and splendour, but was the occasion for the most extensive festivities, which, says an old writer, exceeded those of any other realm in Europe. Thus, going as far back as the time of William the Conqueror, we read how this monarch kept the festival in the year 1085 at Gloucester, when its observance was marked with every outward show worthy of a state ceremonial. Later on, Henry II., following the example of his predecessors, honoured this anniversary with profuse feasting, plays and masques forming part of the Royal festivities; and it is related that in the year 1171 he kept his Christmas at Dublin, when a wooden house was specially erected for the occasion. Still more imposing was the feasting which took place in Westminster Hall, where many of our Sovereigns from time to time held their Christmas. We even read, too, how, when Henry III., in the year 1248, stayed at Winchester, he commanded his Treasurer "to fill the King's great hall from Christmas Day to the Day of Circumcision with poor people, and feast them there;" and it is further on record how Edward II., in the year 1320, kept Christmas at Westminster Hall "with great honour and glorie." Referring more, however, to the feasting connected with this season, some idea of the extent to which it was carried may be gathered from the fact that, in 1241, Henry III. gave orders to the Sheriff of Gloucester to buy twenty salmons for the Christmas pies; and in the books of the Salters' Company, London, we find the following:—"Receipt—Fit to make a moost choycy Paaste of Gamys to be eten at ye Feste of Chrystmasse" (17th Richard II., A.D. 1394). A pie so made by the company's cook in 1836 was found excellent. It consisted of a pheasant, hare, and capon; two partridges, two pigeons, and two rabbits; all boned and put into paste in the shape of a bird, with the livers and hearts, two mutton kidneys, forced meats, and egg balls, seasoning, spice, catsup, and pickled mushrooms, filled up with gravy made from the various bones." Indeed, the more we read of the festive doings of our early Sovereigns at this season, the more it must be admitted that they far exceeded those of after years; and at the present day, it would create no small sensation if our worthy Queen, after the example of Richard III., should "wear the crown, and hold a splendid feast in Westminster Hall, similar to that of a coronation."

Apart, however, from the feasting of these Royal Christmases, various diversions on a very elaborate scale were kept up, neither trouble nor expense being spared to make them as grand as possible. Thus, in the revels of the olden times, the mummers occupied a prominent place, and we are informed that in 1400, when Henry IV. was holding his Christmas at Eltham, he was visited by twelve aldermen and their sons as mummers, and that these imposing personages "had great thanks" from his Majesty for their performance. This kind of diversion, however, did not find equal favour with all our Sovereigns, for Henry VIII. issued an ordinance against this Christmas pastime, declaring all those who disobeyed his command liable to be arrested and put in prison for three months.

The Lord of Misrule, again, was an important personage in the Royal festivities of former years—his duties consisting in directing the numerous revels of the season. Thus Stow, in his "Survey of London," speaking of this custom, says:—"In the feast of Christmas there was in the King's house, wheresoever he lodged, a Lord of Misrule, or Master of Merry Disports." It appears that some of our Sovereigns expended large sums of money upon the sports of the Lord of Misrule, various entries occurring in the "Privy Purse Expenses." Thus, for instance, in those of Henry VII. we find such items as these:—"To the Abbot of Misrule, in reward, £6 13s. 4d." and "To Jacques Haulte, in full payment for the disguising at Christemas, £32 18s. 6d." At Court, too, the Lord of Misrule was generally a writer of plays, and the post was not unfrequently held by a poet of some reputation. Such was George Ferrers, "in whose pastimes," we are told by Warton, "Edward VI. had great delight," and Holingshed further tells us that "being of better calling than commonly his predecessors had been before, he received all his commissions and warrants by the name of the Master of the King's Pastimes." In spite, however, of the encouragement which the Lord of Misrule and his merry doings met with at Court, yet there can be no doubt that scandalous abuses often resulted from the exuberant license assumed by him. Stubbes, a Puritan writer in the time of Elizabeth, denounces the Lord of Misrule as "a grand capitaine of mischief," and has left us a full account of the extravagant acts of this mock officer.

Another characteristic of the observance of Christmas at Court in years gone by was the performance of various plays, which, it seems, were often conducted on a magnificent scale. In the reign of Queen Elizabeth these were much encouraged, and it has been suggested that even Shakespeare himself may have acted before the Queen at Christmas. At any rate, one Christmas play which was highly popular was that of "St. George;" and we know that on different occasions the children of St. Paul's and Westminster not only performed before Elizabeth, but that in 1592 the Heads of Colleges at Cambridge had the honour of acting a Latin comedy before her. In the ensuing reigns of James I. and Charles I. these plays and revels continued to be the fashion, but with the Commonwealth all was changed. Evelyn tells us that, in 1654, there was not even a church open, so that he had "to pass the devotions of that blessed Day with his family at home." After this period Christmas observances at Court never regained their former grandeur. A Christmas pastime, however, which found special favour with Charles II. was gaming at the groom-porter's, an attraction which retained its popularity as late as the reign of George III. The groom-porter of old, says Mr. Timbs, in his "Romance of London," "is described as an officer of the Royal Household whose business it was to see the King's lodging furnished with tables, stools, chairs, and firing; as, also, to provide dice, &c. Formerly he was allowed to keep an open gambling-table at Christmas." Among other ancient customs, we are told how a branch of the Glastonbury thorn used to be presented to the King and Queen of England on Christmas morning. Carol-singing, too, seems to have formed a part of the Royal festivities, and to have gladdened the Court feasts.

Although in modern years a great part of the festivities with which our Sovereigns once celebrated this joyous season are now things of the past, yet during the present reign many a charitable custom and hospitable practice have been instituted which, if lacking the grandeur of the state pageants and revels of bygone times, are, perhaps, more suitable to the proper observance of a festival which is essentially of a homely character. At the Royal table at Windsor Castle, a noted joint is the "Baron of Beef;" and the Boar's Head, which from time immemorial has been an important item of Christmas fare in this country, still regularly makes its appearance at the state Christmas banquet.

T. F. THISELTON-DYER.

OUR ILLUSTRATIONS.

THE CHRISTMAS STORY IN THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL.

Renounce, here sitting by the couch
Of childhood sweet, by sickness marred,
The "pride of life," the worldly pride,
That makes the human heart too hard.

These little ones in pain shall preach
A sermon that we fain must heed;
"Blest are the merciful—the meek—
The kind, in thought, in word, in deed."

Thus, on the Mount, the Saviour preached,
Who healed the sick, and, of His grace,
Blessed the small children in His arms,
And said, "These see My Father's face."

His viewless presence fills this room,
Where gentle ladies, men of skill,
Sothe, as they can, each suffering babe,
And work, so far, the Master's will.

Nor praise, nor thanks, they ask, who here
The Children's Hospital attend;
But spare its funds a half per cent
Of gold that you may save or spend.

Then, if at Christmas you would taste
A pleasure, worldly minds know not,
Visit the Children's Hospital,
And muse beside an infant's cot.

Here see the Christian woman's hand
Bring comfort to the wasting frame,
While from her faithful lips is heard
Our common Father's holy name.

Around this Nurse, this patient, crowd
Some other children, growing well;
This child may die or live—who knows?
Of her—or us—we cannot tell.

This only have we learnt; of all,
The never-dying soul is Love;
On Christmas Day the Child was born,
Who lived and died this truth to prove.

THE CHRISTMAS STORY she repeats,
To cheer the weary, painful hours,
Has comforted all human griefs,
And may relieve the worst of ours.—A.

THE FAIRY OAK.

Come, Sibyl, my child, let us cosily sit
Close here in the shadows now light's on the wing,
Escaping from science, and wisdom, and wit,
We can do as we like, and may chatter a bit
Of revels of elves and romance of the ring.

You needn't be grave, love, and vacantly look
Whilst I pour all this heresy into your ears;
I may not be orthodox reading the book
Of fairyland lore that I never forsook,
Though I've grown pretty grey in the service of years!

They'll tell you, my child, 'tis in science a sin
To picture, or dream, or imagine at all.
For godmother fairies they don't care a pin,
And if only you let them, they're sure to begin
To distrust Cinderella, glass slipper, and ball!

I don't mind confessing, in confidence quite,
That I chanced to be taught in a different school—
They told me how fairies loved moons when alight
And angels kept guard at our pillows at night,
The creed nowadays of a madman or fool!

In spite of the fact that some ages ago,
A poet described us the Midsummer gales
Of Puck and Titania, and flowers aglow
With loves of the fairies, 'tis silly you know—
So 'tis said—to imagine what nobody sees.

But still, my dear child, I don't honestly think
Your innocent mind will be any the worse
For thinking that fairies like dewdrops to drink,
And dance 'neath the stars and the shadows, and sink
With dawn, just as poets propound in their verse.

So, Sibyl, believe in invisible caps,
In fountains that whisper, and flowers that weep,
In the loves of the fairyland court, for perhaps
You may glean for your comfort some mystical scraps
For thinking by day and for dreaming asleep!

CLEMENT SCOTT.

THE YULE LOG.

A Christmas in the olden time,
That makes demand on modern rhyme,
To bring back from the past, the play,
The mummers, masque, and roundelay;
The laughter, and the Christmas glee,
That echoed here from sea to sea;
When folk on all the country side
Made merry at the Christmastide.

How can we sing it? When it seems
That Christmas only lives in dreams;
When cynics bitterly have said,
That Christmas merriment is dead;
And scoffed at carols children raise
As foolish customs of old days.
Ah me! There is not too much mirth,
To cheer us on this dreary earth.

Despite their sneers, with all good will
We'll try to keep our Christmas still;
Be ours to cherish while they last
Traditions of the buried past;
And though the silent tears may flow
For those who left us long ago;
See how the children fresh from school
Bring in the honoured logs of yule.

H. SAVILE CLARKE.

CHARADE.

My first, unlooked for, makes most ladies fly;
Though some, prepared, its very worst defy.
Old Teucer, and his foes, my second knew,
And by its aid Apollo's sun-shafts flew.
When black clouds lour, my radiant whole is seen,
Smiling, amid fast-falling tears, serene:
Blest token of a gracious vow revealed,
As lovers' troth by Love's sweet kiss is sealed.—J. L.

THE CHRISTMAS PANTOMIMES.

BEFORE THE CURTAIN.

At last the day of days has arrived: anticipation has been at fever heat in the nursery and school-room, whilst anxiety has constantly agitated the busy stage. Christmas has come; but it has not gone. The plum-pudding has appeared upon the table; but there is plenty more left in the larder. The children are borne along on the high tide of their speechless enjoyment. Christmas Eve was well enough for the youngsters, with its decorations and delights; it was good fun bringing in the mistletoe and holly, and helping to decorate the old church; and deep in the middle of the night it was sweet to hear the good old carols sung in the frosty air, and with their aid to recall the angel voices and the thanksgiving hymns of Christmas-time. Then out rang the bells to tell the children of another Christmas Day, when old become young again and all day long it is the children's hour. What fun and forfeits; what a cracking of nuts over the huge fire in the hall; what toys and presents from the lighted Christmas-tree! No one has been forgotten; every child in each happy household has been sent to bed without a tear and with a memory that will outlive the oncoming troubles. And only to think that after two such merry days the third has come, which is to be the very happiest of all. For is it not Boxing Day; and has not that good old uncle taken the largest box in the theatre for the first night of the pantomime? The very first night of anticipated pleasure has come to nine tenths of the little ones who gaze upon the scene in silent wonder and astonishment. Imagination in its wildest dreams never pictured anything so wonderful as this. There have been little theatricals at home, plays in the back drawing-room; some fairy tale has been enacted for which kind sisters have supplied the wardrobe, whilst mamma has presided over the piano orchestra. It was good fun to crawl across the mimic stage in a hearth-rug, pretending to be a wolf or bear, and to hear the laughter of kind friends in front; but all that home amusement, the curiosity and contrivances, the songs and dances were, indeed, child's play when compared to a real theatre on Boxing Night. What importance is given to the child by being considered old enough to sit up so late as this; what a sense of mystery and wonderment to be driven through the lighted streets; to see the decorated shops set out with Christmas presents and New-Year's gifts; and to behold, for the first time, the bright electric light on the bridges and embankment! But this is far better than all, and only a very little removed from fairyland. How the myriad lights in the great chandeliers glisten and sparkle, and the stage footlights dazzle; how splendidly the orchestra seems to play; and hark! the boys in the gallery are taking up the tune, and singing together with wonderful swing and precision. One comic song and street tune follows another; the band suggests and the young musicians take it up with a will. Just now there had been a pelting of the pit with orange peel—all in good fun, of course. The lads in their shirt sleeves had whistled and screamed, and saluted friends in distant corners of the gallery; but now all this horseplay is quieted by music and melody. It is Boxing Night, and there must be patriotism as well as pleasure. "Rule Britannia," "God Bless the Prince of Wales," and "God Save the Queen" are sung from thousands of lusty throats, and all the audience rise to their feet, waving hats and handkerchiefs. Loyalty is as necessary as love at Christmas-time. And what has that good old wizard Blanchard prepared for the happy children? He must be as immortal as Father Christmas, and certainly is quite as popular. He will be the guide up the rocks of romance, and away to the fields of fairyland. He will lead his happy followers amidst ogres and giants and elves, to wizard castles and enchanted dens; now you will be at the bottom of the sea, where lovely queens wave sea-weed wands; and now on land amidst the yellow corn-fields and the bluebell lanes. There will be song and dance, and the madcap pranks of thousands of children, liliputian armies and glittering armour, poetry and processions, hobby-horses and the dear old Clown and Harlequin and Pantaloons supporting "airy fairy" Columbine, if they would only ring that prompter's bell and pull up that tantalising curtain. The noise is hushed, the music stops, the overture is over—but wait.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN.

What are they doing behind the curtain? There are beating hearts also in the manufactory of pleasure. Christmas-time means food and raiment to the great majority of those who are awaiting the prompter's signal. They have come from courts and alleys, from cold comfortless rooms, from care and poverty, from watching and from want, to this great busy hive that uncharitable people abuse and ridicule. Times have been bad, the winter has advanced too soon, wages have been slack; but all will be mended now that Christmas has come again. Hearts beat lightly under the princes' tunics and the dancers' bodices, for every mickle makes a muckle, and there is work here, from the proud position of head of the Amazonian army to the humble individual who earns a shilling a night for throwing carrots in a crowd and returning slaps in a rally. And the training and discipline of the rehearsals up to this anxious moment have not been without their advantage. Punctuality, silence, order, and sobriety are the watchwords here. There have been no idling, dawdling, and philandering, as many silly people imagine. Even the little children have learned something, perhaps their letters, perhaps the art of singing in unison, certainly the merit of being smart and useful. But now it is the great examination day. The lessons are over, and the result is soon to be known. What a wild fantastic scene it is—a very carnival of costume. Fairies and hop-o'-my-thumbs, monkeys, and all the miscellaneous mixture of the menagerie, gorgeous knights in armour and spangled syrens, Titania and her train, pasteboard chariots, wands and crystal fountains, fruits and forest trees, mothers, dressers, carpenters, and costermongers for the crowd, all mixed up in apparent confusion, but in reality as well drilled and disciplined as an army prepared for action. All belong to some separate department or division; there is a leader for every squad, who is responsible for his men, and if anything goes wrong a prompt fine is a very wholesome punishment. It has been weary work during the last few rehearsals, and certain scenes have had to be repeated again and again. The testing of the scenery has delayed the action, and it has been late enough before these busy bees have got to bed. But the excitement of the moment gives new vitality. The night has come, and everyone is bound to do his or her best. Everything is smart and new, and the girls and children are proud of their costumes, in which they strut about admiringly. The stage manager has recovered his amiability, and calls everyone "my dear." A rapid, business-like glance is cast over the various scenes to see that everything is straight and ship-shape; the reports come up from the various departments to say there are no defaulters. The gas-man is at his post, and the lime-light man at his station. The ballet-master, with his flag in hand, is standing ready on his stool. Ready? Yes, Sir! is the answer. Up go the foot-lights with a flare, a bell rings, the curtain rises, and the happy people before and behind the Christmas curtain meet.

C. S.

OUR ILLUSTRATIONS.

HOPES AND FEARS.—NEARING HOME.

"As firm as oak and free from care
The sailor holds his heart at sea;"
This was the song he used to sing
When Johnny first came courting me.

The night is dark, the wind is high—
I hear the breakers on the shore—
I wish I had him safe at home
And he would leave me never more.

"Come night's deep noon and ne'er a moon
Or star aloft a watch to keep;"
These were the words he used to sing
When little Jack was rock'd to sleep.

I fancy I can hear his voice—
"Tis but the wailing of the storm!
My heart is glad to be deceived
By shadows if they take his form.

The children playing on the hearth
Wondered to see their mother sad,
For they were full of childish glee,
And wished her also to be glad.

She brushed the starting tear away,
As silently she knelt and prayed;
She tried to calm her aching heart,
And humbly asked for Heaven's aid.

Oh! Ruler of the earth and sky,
Thou holdest ocean in Thy hand,
Have mercy on my children dear,
And send their father safe to land.

With hope renewed she kissed her babes,
While he for whom she breathed the prayer
Stood steadfast on the briny deck,
"As firm as oak and free from care."

The wind went down, the gale was spent,
The good ship made her port at noon—
The sailor kissed his wife and bairns
Before the rising of the moon.

MASON JACKSON.

THE TWO PETS.

Toying with a cigarette,
So to soothe some worrying fret,
And dull thoughts to while away
On a drear December day.
Musing thus on many things,
As I watched the smoke-formed rings,
One fair vision flashed before me,
And on memory's wings upbore me
Far beyond the gloomy present,
Lighting on a scene most pleasant.

Came to mind one afternoon
Of the balmy day in June,
When my wife, caressing, laid
Our pet Bertie in the shade
Of tall, waving trees; around
Flowers enamelling all the ground—
Sweetest rural nook, shut in
From the city's blatant din:
Insect hum and song of bird
Harsh sounds that there were heard.
Monarch of the fairy scene
Ruled our little Prince serene.
His pet Puss, of course, was there,
His beatitudes to share.
Now and then Miss Pussy made
On her own account a raid,
Acting else as Punchinello
To amuse our little fellow.
Nature's arch-Freemasonry
Gave them Open Sesame;
He most readily construing
Every cadence of her mewing;
Pussy's movements, most fantastic,
All her wondrous feats gymnastic,
Racings round and round, distraught,
For her tail she never caught,
Had for him a meaning clear
As the plainest speech we hear.
And Miss Puss, while fast and faster
Circling round her little Master,
Watched his every sign and token,
Knowing it as though he'd spoken;
Every twitch of leg or hand
Being to Pussy a command;
All the movements most erratic
Of his varying moods ecstatic;
And his bubbling talk she knows,
As it billing, cooing, flows;
She his pursed-up lips close watching,
So the regal mandate catching—
Inarticulate, 'tis true,
But plain to her as print to you.

Sometimes Bertie's face would wear
For brief space a look of care,
Calm the far horizon scanning,
As some project he were planning,
Grave and solemn as a judge;
But, sly rogue! 'twas only fudge.
Quickly passed the mood away;
Once more jubilantly gay,
All his members quivering, jerking,
As by some galvanic working;
His eyes lost their far-off gaze,
Scintillating thousand rays.

For an hour my wife and I,
Pleased spectators standing by,
Unseen by our poppet, viewed him,
As soft winds caressed and wooed him;
Like a boy-King on his throne,
Claiming nature as his own;
Of all flowers blushing there
He the sweetest blossom fair.
My dear wife, I scarce need tell,
Felt her eyes with glad tears well,
Swimming, brimming, overflowing,
While her heart with joy was glowing,
As she viewed our darling's glee:—
I?—well, yes!—as proud as she.

JOHN LATHEY.

THE COLOURED PICTURE.

LITTLE MISCHIEF.

Innumerable are the titles that Sir Joshua Reynolds gave to his fancy figure subjects of children. And often as playfully and prettily fanciful as the subjects themselves were their titles. Sometimes, it is true, he would content himself by calling them simply "Boy," "Girl," "Children;" but more often they would be named from some characteristic or expression, or costume; some associated accessory, some employment in which they are engaged; or some attribute, mythological or otherwise, they are supposed to typify. Thus we have the "Age of Innocence," the little "Fortune-Teller," the "Mob-Cap," the "Strawberry Girl"—so named from the pottle on her arm; and elfin "Puck" and "Robin Goodfellow;" then "Colinetta," standing on a tiny mound; "Robinetta," feeding her bird perched on her shoulder; "Muscipula," holding up the mouse-trap, while the cat eagerly sniffs at the poor little prisoner; and "Dorinda," sadly crying over her dead pet by the side of its empty cage. To these we may add the "Boy with Portfolio," the "Reading Boy," the "Little Gipsy Vagrant," and the sturdy little street salesman, with his cabbage-nets on a pole, and the little sister looking timidly over his shoulder, but with faith in the brother's protection. Generally the painter inclined to less familiar, more romantic themes, as in some of those already quoted, and his piping "Shepherd Boy," and "Little Shepherdess" wreathing flowers round her lamb's neck, or leaning on the stile with her crook, while her lambs nibble the scented May-bloom in the hedgerow. The "Children" or babes "in the Wood" appear also more than once. Then, again, Sir Joshua turns his fancy and humour to classical lore, in accordance with the taste of the time, and we have nymphs and cupids—one of them quaintly figuring as a link-boy; an "Infant Hercules," an "Infant Bacchus," and a rogueish "Mercury," holding in his hand a purse he has purloined. Lastly, the master essayed a still higher flight in his "Infant Samuel," "St. John," and group (from the same model) of winged heads, of "young-eyed cherubim," singing their ecstatic jubilate at the Nativity.

In Messrs. Leslie and Taylor's "Life of Reynolds," we are told that the artist picked up one of his favourite boy models from the street, "perhaps dabbling in the kennels of Hedge-lane, or offering his link at the President's coach-window as he drove home from a late sitting at 'the Club,' or an evening party at Mrs. Montague's. Struck by the boy's golden-brown skin, bright black eyes, and knowing smile, Sir Joshua tells him to come—the next disengaged morning—to the great house in the centre of the west side of the square (now Messrs. Puttick and Simpson's sale-rooms), where he will travestie him into a blackguard Cupid or Mercury, and put him on the canvas besides in his own gipsy rags." Elsewhere, we read that "his favourite boy-model—from whom he painted his infant Samuel, the reading boy in crimson, the boy with a portfolio, and others—was a lad, Mason tells us, of about fourteen, 'not handsome, but with an expression in his eye so very forcible, and indicating so much good sense, that he was certainly a most excellent subject for the pencil.' The lad had been left an orphan, with three or four brothers or sisters, whom he taught in succession to make cabbage nets, by the sale of which the little family gained a livelihood. Sir Joshua's love of nature led him to seek for models constantly—where Flaxman sought them—among the ragged vagrants of the streets."

It would be interesting to know that one of these models was transmuted into our "Little Mischief." The untamed vivacity of the expression, the arch, nay, rogueish, *espèglerie* of the eyes, and the unkempt hair, might appear to favour such an assumption. But there are infantine terrors of the house, and "little Pickles" in high life as well as low; and the careful morning toilette made by the nurse is soon put out of trim by romping. The addition of the drum, that instrument of torture to all but the fond parents' ears, might be the painter's device, but more probably the "motif" was presented to his observation. And it would be still more interesting to know that "Little Mischief" was a scion of a noble house. For Sir Joshua, also, often painted portraits of children to which (the portraits we mean) were given some of the fanciful designations already quoted. This is, in fact, one of the family portraits of the Earl of Harrington, and it is engraved by us with his Lordship's kind permission. Sir Joshua painted several ancestors of the present Earl, including the group of the fair Countess with her beautiful children clustering around her—one of his most charming renderings of maternal and filial love; together with her husband, and (also separately) their heir, the Hon. Lincoln Stanhope. This portrait, now reproduced, is, we understand, that of the young son, Reginald.

Our English master, it is needless to add, has never been equalled as a painter of children. To whatever extent he may have been surpassed, technically, by Velasquez, Titian, Rubens, Vandyke, and other great painters, the child-portraits of those masters seem always to represent more or less stiffly-posed, self-conscious little mannikins. To Sir Joshua alone the power was given of seizing and suggesting the momentary, the *impriu*, the unconscious movement, gesture, and expression, the untaught, lithe, subtle grace of supple restlessness, so essentially characteristic of childhood. That this faculty should have been reserved to an unmarried, childless man, and displayed more conspicuously as he advanced into old bachelorhood, may appear strange, but is not inexplicable. Given that the painter was richly endowed with natural sensibilities and perception of beauty, will not restraint upon the sympathies and affections but increase their intensity? And had he been more familiar with the ways of the little angels, had he been brought into closer contact with "Little Mischiefs," might he not have lost some of the fresh zest with which he caught what is most saliently and exquisitely characteristic in them?

T. J. GULLICK.

WORD PUZZLE.

As black clouds pass away in rain
Nature resumes my whole again,
And beauty's most bewitching face
Wears by its aid an added grace.
My head cut off, I straight expand
O'er many a rood by sea and land;
And if one ask for one from you
Then are you bound to give him two.
Another gone, how rich is he
Who strikes, in luck, poor little me.
One more shear off, and at your leisure
You'll doubtless find me lapped in pleasure,
Or sunk supine in idleness,
Yet deep in drollery no less.
Drop yet another, and you meet
My double in each London street.—J. L.

OUR ILLUSTRATIONS.

HIT OR MISS.—A PALPABLE HIT.

Bachelor Brown was a quiet man
Whose scheme of life was a charming plan;
He only wanted to live at ease
With nobody but himself to please;
To come and go at no man's bidding
Except at Malvern or Ben Rhydding;
The doctor's orders were then obey'd,
For Bachelor Brown was much afraid
Of looking florid and growing stout,
He dreaded the very name of gout.
He thought a wife was a useless bore
And nothing in life annoyed him more
Than crying babes or a sudden draught,
And he always frowned when others laughed.

We wonder not that Bachelor Brown
Was not much liked in his native town;
The boys delighted to play him tricks,
And most of the folk their eyes would fix
On distant objects when he pass'd by—
But he only thought they were very shy.

It so fell out on a Christmas Day
That lads and lasses went out to play
When snow lay deep in the fields hard by
And bright and clear was the winter sky.
A snowball battle was soon begun,
When lo! in the thick of fight and fun
A ball was thrown with a sudden whirl,
By a bright and active laughing girl,
Right through the window of Bachelor Brown,
Who starts to his feet with a sudden frown:
And rushing forth he cries, with a hiss,
"Who is the villain that dared do this?"
They all held back and were quite abashed
When they saw their neighbour's window smashed.
But the girl stood up and toss'd her head,
And with laughing eyes she archly said,
"Please, Sir, I wanted to bring you out
To join us all in the snowball bout."

When Bach'lor Brown saw the pretty face,
And marked the figure so full of grace,
His anger fled, and he straightway fell
In love with the saucy village belle.

A very strange thing had come to pass,
"Twas found that the fractured pane of glass
Was broken in shape like a human heart,
Which of course gave Bachelor Brown a start,
For he thought there must be a fate in this,
So he sought the rollicking snowball miss;
With such success did he ply his suit
That she quite forgot his old repute
For when he proposed she couldn't say no,
And ere the coming of next year's snow
Bachelor Brown had a charming wife,
Who proved the joy of his altered life.

"A snowball," they said in the little town,
"Had made quite a man of Bachelor Brown."—M. J.

A SONG FOR THE SEASON.

Come, bring in your mistletoe—hang up your holly—
And pile in their plenty the faggots of Yule.
To-day is the best of all days to be jolly,
And bow to our monarch—the Lord of Misrule.
So each be in trim for a dance or a ditty;—
The fun will be furious and fast, it is clear.
Both elders and youngsters will think 'tis a pity
That Christmas is with us but once in a year.

Let Paterfamilias—a model Jack Horner—
With rapture consume his traditional pie;
And, slowly digesting it up in a corner,
Take stock of the family bills with a sigh.
The tradesmen, of course, will be dunning and pressing;
The taxes and rent may be both in arrear.
Instead of a curse he believes it a blessing
That Christmas is with us but once in a year.

Dear Materfamilias—a prey to rheumatics—
Announces her fears in an eloquent strain.
The whole of the house, from the cellar to attics,
Is built as a trap for the draughts and the rain.
A terrible time is the gloomy December;
The season afflicts her with bodily fear.
Her only resource is to gladly remember
That Christmas is with us but once in a year.

But Youth—never feeling for Pater nor Mater—
Is laughing their bills and rheumatics to scorn.
Till midnight, at least—or a little bit later—
Old games will be played at, and fresh will be born.
In mirth and in frolic, in jests and in laughter,
The night shall be spent until morn shall be near;
And each merry soul shall be sorry hereafter
That Christmas is with us but once in a year.

HENRY S. LEIGH.

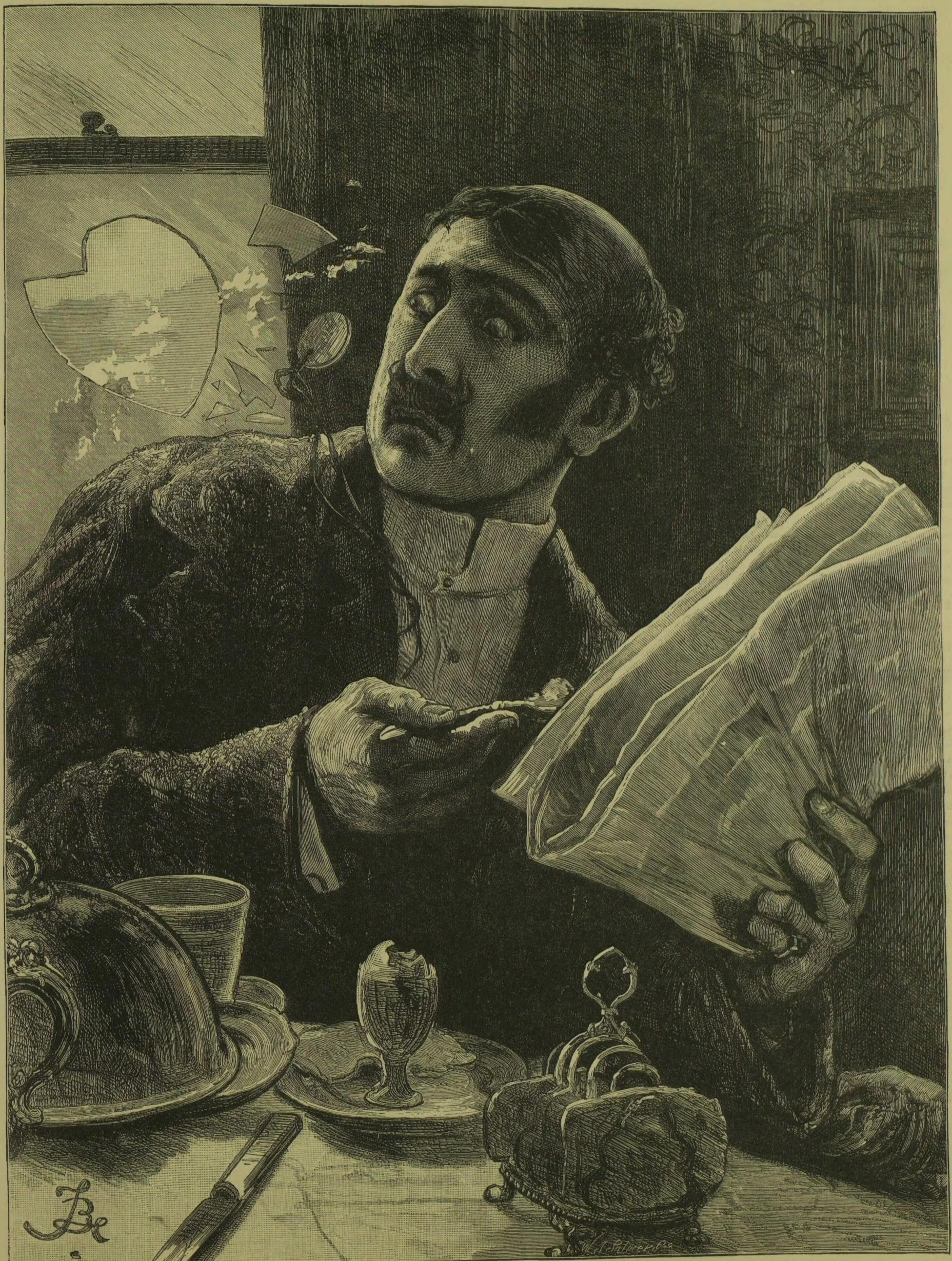
CHARADE.

He stands on the deck, in the death-dark night,
While the waves and the wild winds rave;
And the poor ship strives in her puny might,
To escape from a watery grave.
But the treacherous rocks soon pierce her side,
And she sinks to her doom accurst;
With the life-buoy launched on the waters wide,
He is safely held by my first.

When the storm subsides, and the daylight dawns
On the quietly breathing sea,
For a sight of land, or a sail, he mourns,
In the blank immensity.
But the day drags on, and no hope appears,
And his moments he fears are reckoned;
When a faint puff-puff, with delight he hears,
And, fainting, is borne on my second.

As the vessel speeds on her homeward way,
The rejoicings are loud and great,
For the precious life thus snatched to-day
From a lone and lingering fate.
And he renders thanks as the red wine bright,
Giveth life to his inmost soul;
And mirth holds sway until far in the night,
While my first is drilled by my whole.—W. H.





ENGRAVED BY W. J. PALMER.

DRAWN BY F. BARNARD.

A PALPABLE HIT.

THE
SCOTTISH WIDOWS' FUND
MUTUAL
LIFE ASSURANCE SOCIETY.

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THE HON. LORD SHAND.

GENERAL RESULTS,
SHOWING THE MAGNITUDE OF THE
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55,000 Policies issued insuring	£35,560,115
£1,569,145 of this was transacted in 1880 alone.	
Bonus additions from Profits	£7,800,000
Claims paid at Death	£11,689,566
Policies and Bonuses in force	£24,500,000
Accumulated Funds	£7,413,268
Annual Revenue	£949,942

THE SEPTENNIAL INVESTIGATION

showed that, after making provision for the whole Liabilities of the Society, the Surplus or Profit earned during the seven years ending Jan 31, 1880, amounted to £1,347,755 1ls. 5d., which, in accordance with the laws of the Society, was divided among the Members in the form of Reversionary Bonus Additions to their Policies; the Bonus for the seven years ending that date being at the rate of £1 14s. per cent per annum on the Original Sums Assured and previous Bonus Additions then in force. On the Original Sums Assured alone this Division of Profits yielded

BONUSES from £1 14s. to £3 17s. 5d.
PER CENT PER ANNUM.

THE VALUE OF THE MUTUAL SYSTEM
TO POLICYHOLDERS

comes out prominently in the Division of Profits made among the Society's Members for the seven years ending Dec. 31, 1880. The Cash Value of the Bonuses divided among them amounted to nearly ONE MILLION AND A THIRD STERLING. Under the Proprietary System, any of the proportions of Profit usually secured to Shareholders would have withdrawn a very large sum from the Policyholders in these seven years. Over an average lifetime, therefore, the saving to the Society's Policyholders by its Mutual System must amount to an enormous sum.

MEMBERS JOINING BEFORE DEC. 31, 1881, WILL BE
ENTITLED TO A YEAR'S BONUS MORE THAN
LATER ENTRANTS.

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September, 1881.

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INSTANT CURE.

BUNTER'S NERVINE.

SAVES THE TOOTH.

J. Hounsell, Esq., Surgeon, Britport, writes:—"I consider Bunter's Nervine a specific for Toothache. Very severe cases under my care have found instantaneous and permanent relief."

A gentleman at Bristol writes:—"For six years a decayed tooth prevented mastication, as well as causing many sleepless nights; but, having used Bunter's Nervine, I am not only relieved of the most troublesome of all pains, but can now use the tooth without the slightest inconvenience."

BUNTER'S NERVINE forms a stopping, prevents decay, saves the tooth.

Of Medicine Venders, 1s. 1d.

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THE PERFECT BILLIARD-TABLE.

THE PERFECT DINING-TABLE.

No mechanism to get out of order.

CATALOGUES POST-FREE.

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YANKEE RUBBER BABY.—This amusing Shilling Novelty may now be obtained from Toy and Novelty Dealers throughout the Kingdom. CAUTION.—See that you get the undersigned's "YANKEE" RUBBER BABY, as there are base imitations in the market. Shopkeepers (with card) should apply early for our exceptionally liberal terms, and not miss this chance of making money. The YANKEE RUBBER BABY goes in the waistcoat pocket; blows up to life size, is washable, does not break, or become stiff after use. In the real article, it goes ab fabre, yet screams awfully if smacked. Even experienced fathers are deceived by these laughter-producing infants; and no home can be really happy one without their cheering presence. In long white dress, complete, boys or girls, 14 stamps: twins, post-free, 2s. Address THE FACSIMILEOGRAPH COMPANY, 47, Kempston, Brighton. New Novelty Catalogue, 300 Illustrations, 1s. 3d., post-free.

"FOR THE BLOOD IS THE LIFE."

CLARKE'S WORLD-FAMED BLOOD MIXTURE is warranted to cleanse the Blood from all impurities, from whatever cause arising. For Scrofula, Scurvy, Skin and Blood Diseases, its effects are marvellous. In Bottles, 2s, 6d, each, and in cases, containing six times the quantity, 1s. each, of all Chemists. Sent to any address for 3s or 1s 2d stamps of the Proprietor, the Lincoln and Midland Counties' Drug Company late F. J. Clarke, Lincoln.

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Works—Clay Cross, Chesterfield.
Chief Office—12, Burwood-place, Edgware-road, London, W.
Sale of Coal upwards of 500,000 tons per annum.

Cash on delivery.

All orders to Chief Office, as above.

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A MOST WHOLESOME SWEETMEAT.

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FAMED FOR A CENTURY.

SOLD BY GROCERS AND CONFECTIONERS,

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WHITE'S MOC-MAIN PATENT LEVER TRUSS COMPANY, LIMITED.

WHITE'S

MOC-MAIN LEVER TRUSS is allowed by upwards of 500 medical men to be the most effective invention in the treatment of Hernia. The use of a steel spring, so often hurtful in its effects, is avoided, a soft bandage being worn round the body, while the requisite resisting power is supplied by the

MOC-MAIN PAD AND PATENT LEVER, fitting with so much ease and closeness that it cannot be detected, and may be worn during sleep.

A descriptive circular with testimonials and prices may be had of the Manufacturers, 228, Piccadilly, London.

E LASTIC STOCKINGS, KNEE-CAPS, &c., for VARICOSE VEINS, and all cases of WEAKNESS and SWELLINGS of the LEGS, SPRAINS, &c. They are porous, light in texture, and inexpensive, and drawn on like an ordinary stocking.

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All the following testimonials to the excellence of White's Moc-Main Truss and other surgical appliances have been given to the above Company without being solicited. For obvious reasons they do not publish the names, but the original letters can be seen at 228, Piccadilly:—

Reading, May 12, 1881.

"Sir—I beg to inclose P.O. Order for £2 2s. od. for which I would thank you to send me a Double Truss. I am more than eighty years of age, and I have had a rupture on my right side since September, 1861, and from that time that I have constantly used your Trusses, and am very grateful to you for the support and comfort they have given me.—I am, Sir, yours faithfully and gratefully,"

John White, Esq.

Bacup, April 26, 1881.

"Dear Sir,—I beg to say I have received your Truss, and have used it since I received it, and can bear testimony to the truth of what you say in your Advertisement, as I have worn a Steel Band for fourteen years.

"I inclose a P.O. Order for sixteen shillings.—Yours truly,

"Mr. John White, 228, Piccadilly, London."

Dundee, Scotland, April 14, 1881.

"Dear Sir,—I received one of your Patent Trusses last September. Would you be so good as to send me another of the same, as it answers in a most satisfactory manner, and I have recommended it to many of my friends. I inclose a Post-Office Order for £1 1s. Forward at your earliest convenience and you will much oblige.—Yours truly,"

"Mr. White."

Wolverhampton, April 1, 1881.

"Dear Sir,—I have received the Truss quite safe, and am happy to say it fits perfectly. It could not possibly be better. I shall have great pleasure in recommending them to anyone afflicted in the same way that I am, as I have suffered much from a badly fitting Truss myself.—Remaining, dear Sir, yours truly,

"M. J. White."

Edinburgh, March 4, 1881.

"Sir,—I received the Truss safely. It fits admirably and causes no inconvenience whatever. I inclose P.O. Order in your favour for £1 6s. 9d. Please acknowledge receipt.—I am, Sir, yours truly,"

"Mr. John White."

Leeds, Manchester, Feb. 22, 1881.

"Dear Sir,—Would you please to send me a 38-inch girth Umbilical Truss. I have been using your belts for more than twenty years, and they have given me every satisfaction, so much so that I shall recommend them to my friends who may be situated as I am.

"On receipt I shall forward P.O.O. to the General Post Office, London.—I remain, Sir, yours respectfully,

"Mr. White."

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September, 1881.

THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS CHRISTMAS NUMBER, 1881.—38

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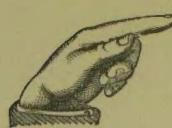
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Mothers who regard Health and Beauty in your Children!

Read This!!! It will Repay you a Thousand-Fold!!!



THE delicate Skin of Infants and Children is particularly liable to injury from coarse and unrefined Toilet Soap, which is commonly adulterated with the most pernicious ingredients; hence frequently, the irritability, redness, and blotchy appearance of the Skin, from which many Children suffer. It should be remembered that **ARTIFICIALLY COLOURED SOAPS ARE FREQUENTLY POISONOUS**, particularly the Red, Blue and Green varieties; and nearly all Toilet Soaps contain an excess of Soda. Very White Soaps, such as "Curd," usually contain much more Soda than others, owing to the use of Cocoa Nut Oil, which makes a bad, strongly alkaline Soap, very injurious to the Skin, besides leaving a disagreeable odour on it. The serious injury to Children resulting from these Soaps often remains unsuspected in spite of nature's warnings, until the unhealthy and irritable condition of the Skin has developed into some unsightly disease, not infrequently baffling the skill of the most eminent Dermatologists.

PEARS' SOAP IS ABSOLUTELY PURE.
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 PEARS' SOAP CONTAINS NO COLOURING MATTER.

PEARS' SOAP IS DELIGHTFULLY PERFUMED.
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ITS DEEP BROWN AMBER COLOUR IS NATURAL TO IT, AND ACQUIRED BY AGE ALONE.

PEARS' SOAP
FOR THE TOILET, NURSERY AND SHAVING.

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PEARS' SOAP
PURE, FRAGRANT AND DURABLE.
PEARS' TRANSPARENT SOAP

A careful perusal of the following Reports of the most Eminent Analytical Chemists, together with the Testimonials of the élite of the Medical Authorities on the Skin, will convince the most sceptical of the immense Superiority of **PEARS' SOAP**.

REPORTS OF EMINENT ANALYSTS.

From Dr. REDWOOD, Ph.D., F.C.S., F.I.C., &c.;

Professor of Chemistry and Pharmacy to the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain.

MESSRS. Pears have long been celebrated for their **Transparent Soap** (Transparent Soap was invented by them), and from frequent examinations and analyses of it during a period of thirty years, I can certify that it possesses the properties of an efficient yet mild detergent, without any of the objectionable properties of ordinary Soaps, which usually contain free fatty acid or caustic alkali, or alkaline salts, giving them a greasy, acrid or irritating character. It is quite free from Cocoa Nut Oil and artificial colouring matter, and may be relied upon for great purity, uniformity of composition, and agreeable perfume. It may be represented as a perfect Toilet Soap."

From CHARLES R. C. TICHBORNE, Esq., LL.D., F.I.C., F.C.S., &c.; Lecturer on Chemistry at Carmichael College of Medicine, Dublin, and Chemist to the Apothecaries' Hall of Ireland.

I HAVE made three separate and independent analyses of **Pears' Transparent Soap**, the samples being procured by myself at ordinary Retail Shops, and from these examinations I am enabled to certify to its purity. It is made in the most perfect manner and is free from any causticity—to persons of delicate skin a question of vital importance. Being free from all adulteration with water its durability is really remarkable. I cannot speak too highly of it, for it strikingly illustrates the perfection of Toilet Soap. Within the last few years a great number of Transparent Soaps, imitations of Messrs. Pears' invention, have appeared in the market of a most inferior and injurious character, consisting of Cocoa Nut Oil, Glycerine, and a large addition of water, and I have found in them over five per cent. of free caustic soda, and nearly one-third water. I need hardly say that such Soaps are necessarily most hurtful."

From Professor JOHN ATTFIELD, F.R.S., Professor of Practical Chemistry to the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain; Author of a Manual of General, Medical, and Pharmaceutical Chemistry.

I HAVE annually, for the past ten years, made an independent analysis of your **Transparent Soap**, and have not found it to vary in quality or in composition. It contains neither excess of alkali nor of moisture, and it is free from artificial colouring matter. A better, purer, or more usefully durable Soap cannot be made."

From Professor CHARLES A. CAMERON, M.D., F.R.C.S.I., S.Sc. Camb. Univ.; Professor of Chemistry and Hygiene in the Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland; Medical Officer of Health & Analyst for Dublin.

I HAVE analysed Samples of **Pears' Soap**, purchased by myself in Dublin. I find it remarkably good—prepared from pure materials, combined in the proper proportions, and free from Cocoa Nut Oil and from artificial colouring. It may safely be used upon the skin of the tenderest infant."

From STEVENSON MCADAM, Esq., Ph.D., &c.; Lecturer on Chemistry, Surgeons' Hall, Edinburgh.

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PEARS' SOAP HAS BEEN AWARDED FIFTEEN INTERNATIONAL HONOURS FOR COMPLEXION SOAP.

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(The 2/6 Tablet is perfumed with Otto of Roses). A Smaller Tablet (unscented) is sold at 6d.

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Stick (In Neat Case No Dish required) or Round Cake (To Fit the Shaving Dish) Price 1s.

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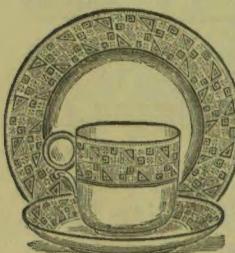
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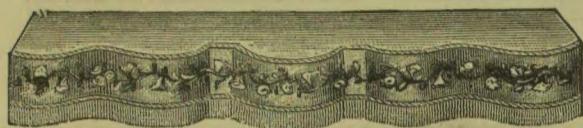
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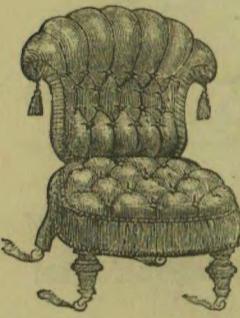
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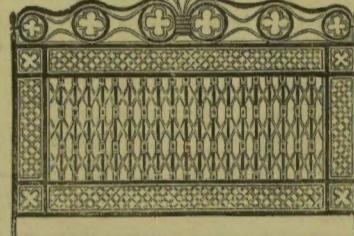


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Ditto, angled to fit in corner of room, same price.HANDSOME WALNUT
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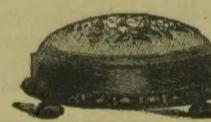
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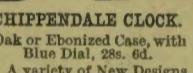
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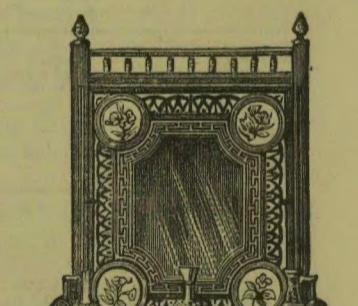
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Upholstered in Hair, and finished in the best manner, 55s.
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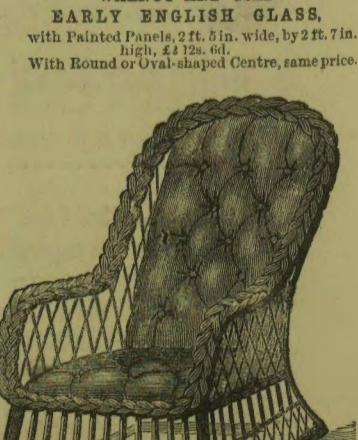
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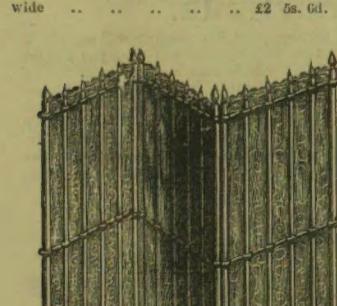
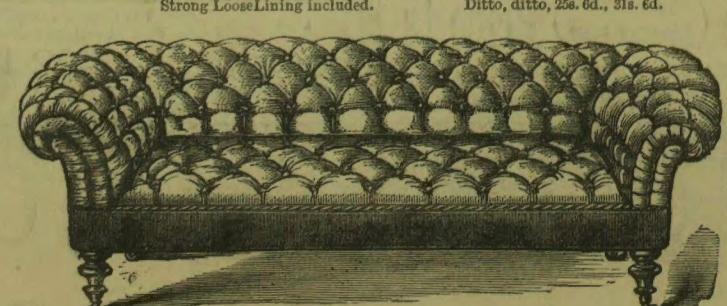
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